



CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

MAYORAL CANDIDATE: DERAY MCKESSON, DEMOCRAT

<https://www.derayformayor.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?

In order to achieve the promise of our city -- to become the Baltimore we all know we can become -- we must challenge the practices that have not and will not lead to the transformation we seek. We must demand more from our leaders and local government – and, most fundamentally, we must invest directly in the well being of the city’s children and youth.

Just as structural racism and inequity are the direct result of past policies and practices, I believe we can begin to structure opportunity – to systematically invest in the well being of children and youth, as you have so aptly stated, from cradle to career. And that as we do so, we will lay the foundation for a city in which all residents can thrive.

My policy platform, *Promise and Possibility: A Plan for Baltimore*

(https://www.derayformayor.com/pdf/DeRayforMayor_Issues.pdf) outlines a specific set of investments and actions that local, state and federal government can make along with philanthropy and business to ensure:

- More babies are born healthy by sustaining and expanding the reach of the B’More for Healthy Babies initiative.
- More children enter school ready by making full use of Head Start and publicly funded pre-K.
- More young people are successful in school through:
 - Teacher and principal training and mentorship programs so that every Baltimore City School student has access to a rigorous curriculum in classroom lead by a highly effective teacher and in a school with vigorous and visionary leadership;
 - Expanding the network of Community Schools, after-school programs and sports leagues; and
 - Reducing truancy and chronic absence by focusing with partners on transportation and health.
- College and career success are a reality by:
 - Increasing internships and work opportunities for high school students – including the expansion of summer work opportunities;
 - Improving college and career advising and career technical education in schools;
 - Establishing a savings account for every child born in Baltimore to use for college or career training;
 - Establishing a four-year scholarship to fill the “last dollar” gap between available family funds, grants and loans and college tuition for those accepted to four year schools;



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- Establishing an Occupational Skills Training Fund for training in high demand occupations that can lead to a family supporting wage; and
- Seeking the radical transformation of Baltimore City Community College into an engine of opportunity for city residents.

I also believe that we can and should demand complete transparency in how the school system currently uses its resources and continue to work with the City's delegation in Annapolis on the state funding formula so that City Schools and our students don't get shortchanged.

These are my priorities. They have been forged by my own experiences as a child in this city, by my early organizing work with the Safe and Sound Campaign, Youth as Resources and the Maryland After School Opportunity Fund and have been informed by conversations across our community. We can do this Baltimore.

Together, we can win.

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?

While over the longer-term – that is, say, within the next two to four years – I do believe we should negotiate a new governance structure for City Schools that includes aspects of mayoral control and/or a partially elected school board. Right now, however, I do not believe the city has the capacity to take on full management. City Schools are a \$2 billion dollar enterprise with 12,000 employees. The City itself is a \$3 billion dollar enterprise with 14,000 employees. We can't come close to doubling our responsibilities without getting our own house in order first.

That being said, I do believe the Mayor has a much more visible and active role to play – even under the current structure – to lead on excellence. And so, as Mayor I would:

- Partner with City Schools to provide strategic investments that will ensure that every Baltimore City School student has access to a rigorous curriculum in a classroom led by a great teacher and in a school with vigorous and visionary leadership.
- Develop a city-wide adult literacy strategy that includes the creation of a diploma granting program for adults
- Develop a city-wide home visiting strategy focused on equipping parents with essential skills and each child with his/her first library
- Demand financial and management transparency from City Schools, including the release of internal audits; and
- As transparency improves and the full picture of the school system's finances emerges, increase the city's own contribution to schools in particular areas of need and opportunity to exceed the current level (which just meets State Maintenance of Effort requirements) and demonstrate city-level leadership and commitment to our schools.



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Truly realizing the promise of Baltimore requires reducing the inequity that continues to plague our school system and constrains opportunity. I am ready to lead this work.

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?*

As some of you may know, I was a youth organizer with the Safe and Sound Campaign -- starting at the age of 14 -- where we developed and implemented the city's first after school strategy and led advocacy efforts resulting in the first city contributions to after school programs. I also was the first director of the Higher Achievement program site in West Baltimore. I deeply understand the importance of out of school time opportunities for young people to develop their unique skills and talents -- to identify their passions -- and to get the support they need to succeed. My existing platform recognizes this commitment by seeking the expansion of the existing network of Community Schools, after-school programs and sports leagues. Specifically, I have called for:

- Increasing Baltimore's current investment in Community Schools and after-school programs to provide academic enrichment, mentoring, counseling, recreation, and other supports in all schools and to all children.
- Establishing city-wide recreational and competitive sports leagues operating through city parks and in middle and high schools -- everybody wins when everybody plays! And,
- Creating an online hub of academic enrichment, out of school time and summer programs that can match students to high-quality learning opportunities offered around 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?*

We face a strange paradox in Baltimore where many former public facilities -- including recreation centers and schools -- are being shuttered even as access to opportunity is unevenly distributed. We need to take a hard look at existing city owned properties and how they might be repurposed and refurbished to provide recreational opportunities across neighborhoods -- not just in a privileged or concentrated few locations. As Mayor I would ask for a comprehensive assessment of all publicly owned and leased facilities -- including public school buildings -- and, in conjunction with neighborhood leaders and community development organizations assess the feasibility of repurposing closed schools and recreation centers to ensure high quality recreation opportunities are available in all neighborhoods.



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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?***

My platform seeks to:

1. Immediately and dramatically expand youth employment with a particular focus on hiring from neighborhoods with the highest rates of young people disconnected from school and work by building on the YouthWorks program that employed 8,000 young people last summer; and to
2. Invest in ensuring students develop 21st century skills by collaborating with local technology entrepreneurs and innovators to launch computer and coding opportunities in schools and after school programs.

We need the full participation of city employers – in technology, in higher education as well as in trade, finance and health care to make this a reality. We have to continue to ask for all who care about the future of our city to step up and open up the doors to opportunity.

- 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?***

We need to ensure that public employees who come in contact with our youth on a daily basis are trained to support their mental health needs and have been trained in key aspects of trauma-informed-care. We also need to ensure that our teachers and other educators have been trained in restorative practices and that schools have the resources to create the conditions for a restorative justice framework to influence school culture.

- 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 Mayor, I would invest in ensuring that there are cultural, entertainment, skill-based, or athletic options for city youth to take advantage of that youth from all neighborhoods can access. Currently, there are not sufficient options for city youth to participate in that would have significant impact in curtailing unproductive behaviors. The Curfew Centers are a stopgap measure in lieu of creating a



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strategy to ensure that city youth are actively engaged in the city's cultural, entertainment, skill-based or athletic options. We do not need Curfew Centers to connect city youth to resources. We can and should continue to invest in community schools to create additional access to services in communities.

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?*

Yes. My platform calls for the expansion of Community Schools to reach all schools/ students. I believe we can get there as we conduct a thorough analysis of current spending, complete agency audits and identify clear priorities for improving the quality of opportunity across our city – which, as I've said – should include a redirection of some funds currently spent on policing to expand opportunity.

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?*

Each of the priorities identified above (in response to your first question) are evidenced based practices aimed at reducing the disparities caused by our legacy of structural racism and disinvestment.

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 everyday safely?*

The Mayor does not currently have joint decision-making power with the Maryland Transit Authority which manages the bus system in the city and I will seek to implement joint decision-making power with the MTA as Mayor. The Mayor must be able to directly influence the bus routes and other transportation systems across the city if we are ever to have a comprehensive strategy regarding transportation and access in our city.

I will develop a city-wide transportation strategy that leverages Transit Oriented Development zoning, advocates for the creation of a east-west connector and includes the Mayor having joint decision-making power with the MTA.