



## The Municipal League of King County

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## 2011 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

The Municipal League of King County requests every candidate who participates in the candidate evaluation process **submit background information prior to his/her interview with a candidate evaluation committee**. The questionnaire is the basis of the League's research and interview process. The League's ratings are non-partisan; they are based on standards of Involvement, Effectiveness, Character, and Knowledge, all of which have been developed and refined over the past 100 years.

A copy of this questionnaire will be provided to Candidate Evaluation Committee members to help them prepare for your interview. Candidate responses, except the confidential section, will be available to the public on the League's website.

The Municipal League requests the following materials from candidates. Please check to make certain you have sent in your:

- Candidate Questionnaire**  
Sent by:  Email  US Mail  Fax  Not Sending
- Resume (education, employment, and professional activities)**  
Sent by:  Email  US Mail  Fax  Not Sending
- Campaign Materials**  
Sent by:  Email  US Mail  Fax  Not Sending
- Constituent Newsletters and other publications**  
Sent by:  Email  US Mail  Fax  Not Sending
- Photograph**  
Sent by:  Email  US Mail  Fax  Not Sending

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**Note: Electronically submitted questionnaires are strongly preferred. All materials can be emailed to [cec@munileague.org](mailto:cec@munileague.org). They can be processed and made available on-line far more rapidly than handwritten or typed submissions.**

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For non-electronic submissions, please print clearly and legibly and return the application **as soon as possible in order to allow the committee the greatest amount of time to prepare a complete report on your skills and experience.**

If you have not yet been contacted to schedule an interview, or if you have questions about the candidate evaluation program, please contact the League office at 206-622-8333.

If you have a disability and require accommodation to participate in the candidate evaluation process, please contact the CEC Coordinator at the League office.

A League volunteer Candidate Investigator is waiting to receive your questionnaire to begin his or her work. Please complete and return the questionnaire to the League office at your earliest convenience.

**Please have your materials to us no later than June 10th, 2011.**

Email the completed questionnaire and other materials to:  
[cec@munileague.org](mailto:cec@munileague.org)

# 2011 Candidate Questionnaire

## SECTION I

### BASIC CANDIDATE INFORMATION

1. Name as it will appear on the ballot

| First Name | Middle Initial or Nickname | Last Name |
|------------|----------------------------|-----------|
| John       |                            | Cummings  |

2. Office sought (include office, jurisdiction, position/district number):

**Seattle School Board Director, District 1**

3. Are you the incumbent?  Yes  No

4. How long have you resided in this district/city?

**I have lived in Seattle for 13 years and at my current address for 8 ½ years.**

5. How long have you resided in King County?

**13 years**

6. Is the office sought partisan or nonpartisan?  Partisan  Nonpartisan

7. If partisan, please indicate party:

### CAMPAIGN CONTACTS

Campaign Website: [cummingsforschoolboard.blogspot.com](http://cummingsforschoolboard.blogspot.com)

### POLITICAL BACKGROUND

1. Beginning with the most recent position, please list public offices you have held. Include positions on appointive boards or commissions.

| Public Office | Elective or Appointive? | Dates Held | Leadership Role (if any) |
|---------------|-------------------------|------------|--------------------------|
|               |                         |            |                          |
|               |                         |            |                          |
|               |                         |            |                          |

2. If you ran for public office but were not elected, please list those races below:

| Office Title | Year of Run |
|--------------|-------------|
|              |             |
|              |             |
|              |             |

## SECTION II

In this section, we are seeking responses that reflect the four ratings criteria: involvement, effectiveness, character, and knowledge. These are defined as follows:

- **Involvement:** What has the candidate done previously in family, neighborhood, community, volunteer work, employment or public life to suggest readiness to accomplish challenging objectives? How do these activities demonstrate readiness for the challenges unique to the office sought?
- **Effectiveness:** Has the candidate demonstrated promise of being productive in the office sought? Has the candidate shown the ability to work with other people?
- **Character:** Do the candidate's personal traits show the ability to take on the responsibilities of campaigning for and holding the public office she or he is seeking? Is the candidate a leader, participant or observer? Is the candidate trustworthy, reliable and candid?
- **Knowledge:** Has the candidate demonstrated the willingness and ability to learn and adapt? Does the candidate understand the duties and challenges of the office sought? Does the candidate have a firm grasp of the issues important to his or her constituency and their potential effects?

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1. In one page or less, why are you running for this office? (Note: the interview committee will be given a copy of this statement before your interview; at the beginning of your interview you will have the opportunity to expand on this statement in any way you wish.)

**I am running for office because I have become very concerned with the decisions that the District's leaders have been making over the past few years as well as the drastic culture shift that our most recent Superintendent initiated and our current Interim Superintendent seems to support.**

**The School Board has not acquitted itself very well since the current Directors were elected. The Board seemed to abdicate much of its power to the Superintendent as can be seen by their voting record. Since late 2007 the Board has voted to approve approximately 95% of the proposals brought forth by the Superintendent and her staff. While I am not advocating that the Board disagree for the sake of disagreeing, I think that, even on the surface, such a high percentage of 'Yes' votes is a reason for examining the votes themselves. It is when I started to look at the individual Board actions that I first contemplated my candidacy. This School Board approved policy changes that have negatively impacted our children and many times voted unanimously to do so. They also voted bonuses and contract extensions for the Superintendent, even as late as last summer (2010), when it was already becoming apparent that the Superintendent was not performing her job duties very well. As I see it, we have a School Board that is, as a whole, uneducated regarding issues of importance and is prone to regard the Central Administration staff as trustworthy experts who know how best to educate our kids. Instead of exercising their oversight responsibilities, the Board deferred to the Superintendent and her staff. Unfortunately, Central Administration proved to be much less than trustworthy.**

**The Directors finally voted unanimously to fire the last Superintendent yet they did so only after the 'Pottergate' scandal landed in the news and the people of Seattle demanded that she be dismissed. Now, we have learned about the MLK sale and the strings that were pulled to make that happen. I am astonished that anyone on the Board thinks they deserve to be re-elected**

**The School Board also allowed the Superintendent to impose a drastic change in the school district's culture. Research-based methods of instruction have been discarded in favor of expensive pre-packaged curricula, some of which are ineffective and unsupported by research. Site-based decision-making is gone. Teachers have lost their voice and fear reprisals if they speak up, yet they are expected to deliver an inferior product to their students. Morale is low as a result and the inevitable exodus from the teaching profession has already begun. It's as regrettable as it is preventable.**

**What I have stated above may be a convincing argument for ousting the current School Board, and may also be the catalyst for my candidacy, but it does nothing to persuade people to vote for me.**

**Why do I strongly believe that I am the best choice at this time for the position I seek?**

- 1. Experience- I have been working in public education for over 20 years as a Special Educator, Crisis Interventionist, Coach and Advisor. Most of my students have been At-Risk either because of disability, socio-economic status, ethnicity, or any combination thereof, and as a result have been the ones that tended to be adversely affected when effective policies were replaced by ideologically driven policies. I will be their voice on the Board ensuring that the most fragile of our students are not overlooked.  
I also understand what it is like to have ill-conceived policies forced on educators because I have experienced it. I have seen how burned out teachers can become by having to use methods that they know are ineffective in order to save their jobs. This includes curriculum that Seattle has adopted. I will keep their interests in mind.**
- 2. Knowledge- I have a Master's degree in Special Education. My concentration was on effective methods for teaching At-risk students. I know a lot about what works and what doesn't in the classroom. I also know how to do good research so that I can learn what I need to learn in order to cast a vote that is not dependent upon the information given to me at the meeting by either a District representative or a salesperson from a textbook publisher. I will not be intimidated by 'experts' because I will be up to speed on the issues they present.**
- 3. Vision- We can make Seattle a model school district and be fiscally conservative at the same time. For example, why should we pay for pre-designed curricula along with the hours of professional development necessary to implement it the way the publishers intend and the academic coaches that are hired when the curricula doesn't work as promised? We already have a large number of professionals on staff who are trained in curriculum development and could be charged with that task at no extra cost to us. These professionals are our teachers. The hours now spent in professional development could be spent in curriculum development. There would be no need for academic coaches, so they could get back into the classroom. The teachers would feel empowered and not burnt out. The kids would benefit greatly from this.  
That is just one example. I would be happy to discuss others.**

2. Describe your most important personal characteristics or traits as they relate to the office you seek.

**I tend to get along with others, even when I don't agree with them. I believe that it is essential that we treat people with respect no matter how different their outlook is from mine. Throughout my adult life I have tried to stick to that principle, and it has proven to be a very successful approach to moving people to reach an agreed upon goal.**

**Even though the School Board is made up of a group of strong-minded people who may not be of the same mind on certain issues, it can't be dysfunctional. There has to be a sense of shared responsibility for the welfare of our children. Therefore the Board has to have a certain amount of social ease or collegiality. When people like each other they tend to be more willing to listen to each other with open minds and find common ground on which to build solutions.**

**I am a nice guy.**

**That's not to say I am a pushover. I will hold my ground and have been known to take a principled stand in the face of strong opposition. I can be very persuasive, without bullying folks.**

**I am a problem solver. There is something really cool about tackling an issue that seems unsolvable and working toward a solution, especially so when a group gets there. I am not the one to quit in situations like that.**

**It's important for the School Board to be able to not only see the 'big picture' but also be able to articulate it to others. I think that one of my best traits is the ability to see the big picture and then break it down for others, whether it be co-workers or students.**

**I am a leader. People have told me that I have a dynamic personality and that I can get people to listen to what I have to say. It's a trait that helps when you have a class of squirrely 6<sup>th</sup> graders as well as a group of cynical, restless adults. Maybe I'm really just the loudest guy in the room, but I'll take the compliment.**

**I believe that the School Board needs to have a person with my traits or skills, if we are going to move this District in a direction that will help every child learn while respecting the adults who do the hard work every day.**

3. Please describe, in sufficient detail, one to three accomplishments or contributions of which you are most proud. These examples should illustrate skills and capabilities you think apply to the office you are seeking. These accomplishments may have occurred at any time in your personal, professional, or public life.

Throughout my professional life I have always enjoyed working with the kids who can't seem to stay out of trouble. I realized early on that I have a knack for getting students to turn things around and become successful students and eventually adults. I thought that it was something inherent in me, my personality, use of humor, my teaching style or maybe because I'm not a big guy and I don't use intimidation to control kids. I never thought it was something that I could transfer to others, it wasn't a system it was just me.

But in 2007 I had the opportunity to step into a co-teaching situation with a 'blended' class. Half of the kids were special ed and half were general ed. The class as a whole was full of big personalities and behaviors that had been getting them in trouble in the past. I had never co-taught before and I was replacing a teacher who had left, so my co-teacher already had his curriculum in place and he was happy with it. As a result I concentrated on the kids' behaviors with the intention of 'doing my thing' and helping a few find success. I never thought that we would develop a program based on my style which could be taught to other teachers, but that's exactly what we did. My co-teacher appreciated my approach and we started to talk about why I did what and when. He adapted my strategies to his own style and the results were incredible. We became intentional in our approach, meaning that we would walk through a strategy and implement it. The kids flourished and entered high school better prepared academically and behaviorally.

The following school year we began work with our students with an eye toward preparing them to deal with some of the eventualities that normally would derail them. We used a lot of role-playing strategized with the students on how to deal with people who weren't necessarily treating them fairly. We taught the kids about some of the hidden rules in school and how it's important to know what is expected of them. We also trained them to be barrier breakers, to be the one who breaks through the stereotype so that the teacher sees the person in front of them, not the stereotype. It was an amazing year. The kids were spectacular, not only did their behavior improve when they were with us, they weren't getting in trouble in their other classes, or in the hallway or even at home. Teachers told us how they couldn't believe the transformation in these children. I wonder if they noticed their own transformation as 'those kids' became their kids.

Unfortunately, the blended model fell under the budget ax and was not carried into the next year. I learned so much though, about how to collaborate, problem solve, persuade people to change without making them defensive, tackle problems by being intentional instead of going on instinct alone. I carry what I learned and apply it everyday.

4. Please list or describe current and past activities in the community in which you have acquired skills that relate to the office you seek. Include your role in the activity and the year(s) in which you were involved. Involvement consists of many areas such as family, neighborhood, community, employment, or public life.

**I am a well-trained Special Education Teacher with a Master's Degree and quite a few years under my belt. Special Ed. teachers are different (not better) than general ed teachers. We have to not only design programming for students with a wide variety of needs and skills. We have to implement it successfully. We have to work with and support general ed teachers so that they can be effective with our kids. We have to walk a fine line as well, because sometimes our kids present problematic behaviors that can unsettle even the best teachers. We have to be advocates for our kids to administrators who, sometimes, are impatient. I know a lot about effective teaching. I understand kids and what they need to succeed. I will provide a teacher's perspective to issues that we tackle as a Board. I will be a positive addition to the School Board.**

**I am now a stay at home father for the second time and I have to admit it is a tough job. Being a parent means that no matter what time of day or night, you are on the job. I have become very good at switching gears instantly and I think I am doing an ok job of it.**

**My wife and I bought a business a few years back and I learned a lot about finance and although I sometimes need a little help, I have a fairly good understanding of basic accounting, as well as how to work with sales people, construction workers, customers. It has helped broaden my perspective.**

5. Please describe the duties of the office you seek. Which are the most important duties and why?

**Vision- The Board provides the vision of what the District should become.**

**Leadership- The School Board needs to be the leader it was intended to be. The Board sets the policies that the Superintendent enacts**

**Oversight- The Board must provide proper oversight of the Superintendent, his/her staff and safeguard the financial viability of the District. The Board must take this responsibility seriously.**

**Advocacy- Our children need a strong advocate. The Board is that strong advocate, to the community, the city and beyond. It is a lot of responsibility.**

## Finished!

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If at all possible, send your response to the Municipal League electronically as an email attachment, or insert it into an e-mail message ([cec@munileague.org](mailto:cec@munileague.org)). Mail and fax numbers are listed below. If the League has not contacted you to schedule an interview, please call the League office at your earliest convenience.

Don't forget to send the following to the Municipal League: a resume, a photo, campaign literature, and, if you are an incumbent, constituent newsletters and other materials. Please use the check-off list on the cover sheet of this packet to indicate which items you have sent.

A League volunteer Candidate Investigator is waiting to receive your questionnaire to begin his or her work. Please complete and return the questionnaire to the League office at your earliest convenience.

**Please have your materials to us no later than June 10, 2011. May 28<sup>th</sup> is preferred!**

Email the completed questionnaire and other materials to:  
[cec@munileague.org](mailto:cec@munileague.org)

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION AND GOOD LUCK IN YOUR CAMPAIGN!

### THE MUNICIPAL LEAGUE OF KING COUNTY

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