

Maryland State Delegate Candidate Questions & Answers 2022

Jenny Zeng

Candidate for State Delegate in District 9A

Preliminary Questions

Are you, or have you been, a PTA member? If so, have you been a PTA officer?

I have been actively involved in PTA events, such as PTACHC meetings, international nights, staff appreciation, and all kinds of events. I was a member of the PTAs of Triadelphia Ridge ES, Folly Quarter MS, and River Hill HS when my children attended those schools. I was the chair of the staff appreciation committee at Triadelphia Ridge Elementary School.

I was the delegate of PTACHC for Triadelphia Ridge Elementary School from 2019 to 2021 and was on the policy review committee in 2021. I was the chair of the book fair in the PTA of Folly Quarter Middle School in 2021-2022.

Have you signed on to the “no developer, no dark money” pledge? What factors influenced your choice?

I do not want to sign a pledge written by some group I am not familiar with. But, I pledge as a Christian that I will not take any money from developers or any dark money from anyone for my campaign.

The pandemic has brought a new level of transparency with many state meetings posted online. While more PTA members have participated, more are becoming aware of bills that die without explanation or a vote consideration. Are there changes to this practice that you would implement?

I would push for an explanation of why bills die in the committee without a vote consideration. If I sponsor a bill, I would make sure to follow through with my constituents to provide an update on the final outcome of the bill or provide a full explanation of the reasons if the bill does not get a vote consideration.

Blueprint

A blueprint goal has been to set a minimum \$60,000 base salary for teachers. How does that plan account for inflation? Should the law be amended?

If the current plan does not account for inflation, yes, I think it is reasonable to consider inflation in the future to provide proper compensation to our school teachers. However, I do not think spending alone, as the blueprint, will solve all the issues in our public school education.

In April 2022, it was reported that teachers’ salaries were 11% less than they were 30 years ago in real dollars, what inflationary trends would you seek to adjust first?

I have not seen this report and need to study that report. However, I believe teachers should be properly compensated to ensure we provide quality education to our children.

How can you help ensure that the school systems in Maryland meet the financial obligations of Kirwan/Blueprint for Maryland’s future? What are areas that need reconciliation with the state government offices?

When the general assembly passed the bill, Governor Hogan warned that MD may have difficulty in meeting the financial obligation of Kirwan/Blueprint for Maryland's future. I asked the same questions years ago at a PTACHC meeting when Annapolis people came to Howard County to present the Kirwan commission. Taxes may be on the way to rise for our residents and businesses. Our small businesses were particularly damaged by the Covid shutdowns. On the other side, taxes are on the rise. The implementation of the Kirwan Blueprint will most likely further increase the tax burdens on our small businesses and households. Higher taxation is not good for the local economy, because it will discourage business investments and discourage new business from moving into Maryland, and make it difficult to start a new business or grow an existing business. Consequently, there will be few private-sector jobs in the state. Kirwan Blueprint is based on an assumption that the more you spend, the quality of education will automatically improve. This is a false assumption. There is no evidence that spending alone improves educational outcomes. The Democrat-controlled General Assembly overwhelmingly passed the Kirwan Blueprint, overriding Hogan's veto. In the absence of state funding for the Kirwan Blueprint, the law is essentially an unfunded mandate, putting the burden on counties. That could force counties to raise taxes, without properly measuring the outcome/result of the spending.

Budget

Unlike most of the more than 13,000 school boards across the nation, Maryland school systems rely on state and local government funding through our "maintenance of effort" law. What are the pros/cons of not giving our local school boards taxing authority?

I need to do some research about Maryland "maintenance of effort" law and how it is different from other states. Giving our local school boards taxing authority does not adhere to the principle of separation of powers.

Has the "maintenance of effort" threshold laws worked effectively enough to fully fund increasing costs related to school systems? Are the annual increases in the "maintenance of effort" enough to fully fund our school systems?

It depends on the county budget.

School funding comes from a blend of county, state, and federal resources. Do you believe the county growth controls are effectively meeting the corresponding state matching demands to accommodate growth?

I will.

With inflation reaching 8% or more, what are the largest state functions without inflation indexing that are vulnerable to lowered spending value? Which would you legislate?

I will listen to educators' and parents' input.

Are there plans to, once again, try to pass legislation imposing excise taxes on commercial building construction so that the revenue can be used exclusively to remedy the millions in deferred maintenance needed by HCPSS schools? Are there any other ways money can be raised to address this problem?

We should think carefully about imposing taxes. We can't simply kill the chicken to get the eggs. We should promote local businesses and build a prosperous community to create more revenue to provide money to address this problem.

HCPSS Operations

Is there anything, from a state legislative perspective, that you think could increase the appeal of teaching as a profession in Maryland? What would help attract and retain quality teachers?

I would advocate education programs in college to provide more qualified teachers and promote special institutes for teachers' training.

How would you help address the teacher shortage?

- Provide an excellent educational environment for students and teachers.
- Provide incentives for good teachers and improve accountability of our school education systems.
- Consider providing school-choice programs, from public school, charter school, and private school to homeschool. Provide parents with school education choices for competition and excellence in education and children an opportunity to receive a quality education.

Should the government offer free or reduced tuition in-state colleges for students who commit to teaching for a minimum number of years?

This is a great idea!

How can the state legislature help address the overcrowding in our schools?

Stop excessive residential and commercial development, with full consideration of the public facility of schools, libraries, even police stations, hospitals, and so on.

We should have a citizen committee to allow the development to avoid overcrowding in our schools.

How can the state best help the locals improve student proficiency in Math, English, and Science in light of recent staggering declines?

- Stop political indoctrination, and restore high academic expectations and proper evaluations to improve students' school performance.
- Invest more resources in areas most needed to get every student college OR career ready.
- Consider providing school-choice programs, from public school, charter school, and private school to homeschool. Provide parents with school education choices for competition and excellence in education and children an opportunity to receive a quality education.

Due to the pandemic, student learning has fallen behind by an estimated 15 weeks. How do you plan to close this gap?

Provide a summer program or online program.

What have you done, or will you do, to make school funding a priority?

We always have school funding with the highest priority.

How can the state increase local school districts' accountability for how they spend their tax dollars?

Make sure the school budget is transparency.

What state regulations would you have to modify if the HCPSS shifts away from contracted bus services to an in-house system of bus fleet maintenance and operations?

It depends on budget and quality of service qualification. Let professional people do professional things.

Are there ways the state legislature can help the local school districts make redistricting less divisive for local communities?

I agree the state legislature should help the local school districts make redistricting less divisive for local communities, Legislature should not intervene and promote radical redistricting directly.

What can the state do to improve school safety?

Advocate restoring the School Resource Officers.

Would you support a bill that would no longer require 180 days of in-person instruction?

Basically, our education system should have a high standard with flexibility for real situations.

Specific Legislation – Burden of Proof

What can the Howard County delegation do to further the passage of legislation that shifts the burden of proof from parents to public agencies in due process hearings under the IDEA? What can parents and advocates do to support your efforts? Why do the bills to make this change over the past 9 years keep failing?

I will listen to parents' voice.

Special Education

When the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) became law in 1975, the federal government promised to fund 40% of the additional cost of educating children with disabilities. Yet, the federal government has never provided more than 20%, with state and locals making up the rest of the cost. As a stakeholder, would you sponsor legislation to coordinate with all parties for a solution?

Yes.

Student Member of Board (SMOB)

What do you think is the role of the student member of the Howard County Board of Education? Should they be able to vote on budgetary matters?

The role of the student member of the Howard County Board of Education is fantastic, but we should take into account its weight on budgetary matters.

Curriculum Content

Would you support legislation that would allow parents to opt their kids out of sexually explicit content in schools?

I strongly support legislation that would allow parents to opt their kids out of sexually explicit content in schools. We should not have those improperly sexually explicit content in schools. Schools should focus on academic education, and stop that cultural and ideological political indoctrination.

Would you support a bill, like HB 1256 introduced in February 2022, that aims to prevent schools from teaching certain “discriminatory concepts”, such as that “one race or sex is inherently superior to another race”, or that an “individual, because of the individual’s race or sex, is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously?”

Again, schools should focus on academic education, and stop that political indoctrination with those critical race theories which will eventually bring cultural and ideological warfare, hate, discrimination, and racism into our school system

Environment

There is increased pressure to build schools denser on the same or less amount of land, reducing the amount of green space per student and public overall. Would you endorse legislation to expand green space over time, despite the increased costs from development competition?

It depends on the budget. We face overcrowding issues in some public schools currently.

Would you support legislation that provides additional incentives for bus electrification? How would you resolve the differences between safety measures on dedicated school bus and transit bus designs?

Safety is above all for dedicated school bus.

The Climate Solutions law (SB 528) is designed to incentivize building more net-zero energy-efficient schools and require school systems to purchase zero emissions school buses in the coming years. What would you consider a benchmark threshold to revisit the regulation for additional support?

Schools should focus on academic education. Zero-emission is controversial and we need more research, investigation, and consulting experts.