

Questionnaire for PTACHC
Candidate: Julie Kaplan
Responses submitted: April 3, 2024

QUESTIONS ASKED DURING THE FORUM

PTA-RELATED

Are you a current or former PTA member? Yes, I was a member of the PTA for the 15 years my children were enrolled in Howard County Public Schools (2006 to 2021). Both attended elementary, middle, and high school in Howard County Public Schools. I was an active member of the Reservoir High School Boosters from 2016-2021.

Have you had a PTA leadership role before? No.

When the school board makes decisions they will often consider how PTAs will respond to those decisions. For example, if the Board cuts a program, the Board may think that PTAs will step in to fund the program. What role should PTAs play in financially supporting the school system? How will you ensure that the Board will not rely on PTAs to pay for things the school system should be providing?

Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) play a vital role in enriching students' educational experiences, primarily through organizing events, providing volunteer support, and occasionally funding programs that go beyond what the school budget covers. These contributions are designed to supplement rather than replace essential educational resources and are tailored to the specific needs of their school communities. The funding from PTAs, derived from voluntary fundraising and donations, is intended for enhancements and unique opportunities like extracurricular activities, educational technology, or special events that add value to the standard curriculum.

To prevent over-reliance on PTAs for essential funding, clear guidelines and policies delineating the responsibilities of the school board and the role of PTAs are crucial. This ensures that PTAs support is appropriately utilized without substituting for the foundational responsibilities of the educational system. This is vitally important as the financial resources of the PTAs vary greatly. Regular dialogue between the school board, administrators, and PTA leaders fosters a mutual understanding of the financial landscape, aiding in the strategic allocation of resources.

Transparency in budgeting and the use of funds, alongside PTA contributions, builds trust within the community and underscores the accountability of educational authorities.

Moreover, PTAs can advocate for adequate educational funding from sources such as local business, gotta eat nights, and other fundraisers emphasizing the importance of external support for maintaining high-quality education standards. By distinguishing the supplementary role of PTAs from the core funding obligations of the school system, a balanced partnership can be achieved. This collaboration should aim at enhancing the educational environment in ways that are sustainable and equitable, ensuring that all students benefit from a well-rounded education without undue dependence on extra funding from Parent Teacher Associations.

EXPERIENCE

Have you testified on any topic impacting HCPSS? If so, when did you testify and what was the topic?

Although I have not had the opportunity to testify before the Board of Education, my involvement and interest in the well-being of HCPSS have been constant. My positions on educational matters are informed by my children's, nieces, nephews, and neighbors' experiences, as well as my commitment to ensuring that all students have access to high-quality education that prepares them for the future. My advocacy for our schools is focused on promoting educational excellence, ensuring fiscal responsibility, and supporting the mental and physical well-being of all students. I am deeply invested in contributing to a school system that not only meets the current needs of its students and staff but also anticipates and adapts to future challenges, ensuring the success of every child within HCPSS.

What decision(s) by the current Board of Education have you agreed with, if any?

I appreciate the proactive approach taken by the Board of Education in engaging with the community to gather input on our priorities for selecting a new Superintendent. Utilizing online surveys, hosting listening sessions, and meeting with constituent groups and school partners are effective ways to ensure that diverse perspectives and voices are considered in this important decision-making process. This demonstrates a commitment to transparency, inclusivity, and responsiveness to the needs and preferences of the community.

What decision(s) by the current Board of Education have you not agreed with, if any?

In the 2023-24 Transportation Action Report, there are significant concerns regarding the Board of Education's decision to select Zum as the new bus contractor for the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS). This decision has not only compromised the physical safety of students but also caused massive disruptions to parents and academic schedules, with many students arriving late or missing instructional time. Zum, a West Coast transportation company, was awarded contracts constituting 45% of HCPSS bus routes after a competitive bidding process. However, the implementation faced numerous challenges from the onset, including inadequate preparation for the start of the school year, a shortage of drivers, lack of adequate training, and insufficient planning for traffic flow and bus lot management. The late delivery of routes to Zum prevented dry runs, essential for ensuring the routes were viable and that drivers were familiar with their routes before the first day of school. Consequently, on the first day, 340 of the system's 503 bus routes arrived late, and students with specialized transportation arrived home as late as 6:30 PM. This inadequate preparation and lack of foresight in the decision to contract Zum significantly impacted the transportation service's reliability and efficiency, directly affecting the students' well-being and academic performance.

ROLE ON THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Our board of education can be divided on issues, what will you do to build consensus with Board members even on issues that you all may not agree on?

To build consensus with Board members on divisive issues, I will prioritize open communication and active listening to understand each member's perspective and concerns. I will seek common ground and focus on shared goals related to student success and well-being, highlighting how collaboration can achieve these outcomes. Lastly, I will advocate for data-driven decisions and consider compromise solutions that respect diverse viewpoints while advancing the board's overarching mission. As a registered independent/unaffiliated voter that has not received the backing, including financial, of any particular party, I am uniquely positioned to facilitate unbiased dialogue and bridge differences, making it easier for me to play a mediating role in achieving consensus.

How would you work with the County Executive and County Council to increase or ensure adequate funding for the school system?

To ensure or increase funding for the school system, I would engage in a collaborative, data-driven approach with the County Executive and County Council. By establishing transparent relationships and utilizing data to illustrate the direct impact of funding on student outcomes and community benefits, I aim to build trust and demonstrate accountability. Highlighting how education investment contributes to broader county priorities like economic development and community well-being, I would actively seek shared goals and be open to

creative funding solutions. This strategy, centered on mutual understanding and showcasing tangible benefits of past investments, is designed to build a consensus around the importance of education funding, ensuring the school system's needs are effectively met.

What parts of the Blueprint do you agree are good for HCPSS?

I broadly support the Blueprint for its potential to significantly enhance the quality of education in the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS), provided its implementation is well-managed and costs are carefully considered. The emphasis on raising the College and Career Readiness Standard is particularly commendable, aiming to ensure that our high school graduates are not just diploma holders but are genuinely prepared for the challenges of college and the workforce. This alignment with the practices of the world's top-performing education systems can elevate the educational outcomes for all students in Howard County.

Moreover, the Blueprint's focus on supporting teachers through training and adequate compensation is a vital component that I strongly endorse. Teachers are the backbone of our education system, and investing in their professional development and well-being directly correlates with improved student outcomes. This approach not only helps in attracting and retaining high-quality educators but also ensures they have the tools and motivation needed to adapt to and thrive in an evolving educational landscape.

However, while these aspects of the Blueprint represent significant opportunities for HCPSS, it's crucial that we remain vigilant about the overall costs associated with its implementation. We must be good stewards of the tax dollars funding this program, ensuring that investments yield tangible improvements in student achievement and operational efficiency. This means prioritizing spending that directly impacts classroom learning and teacher support, while also exploring innovative, cost-effective strategies to meet our goals. Being mindful of expenses will help us maintain a balanced approach, ensuring that the Blueprint not only leads to educational excellence but does so in a financially sustainable manner.

What parts of the Blueprint do you think may have a negative impact on HCPSS, if any?

I'm concerned about the potential weakness of the Blueprint's accountability component, reflecting on Howard County Board of Education's (BOE) past challenges, like the school start times initiative. Marc Tucker's* presentation underscores the Accountability and Implementation Board's (AIB) critical role in ensuring Blueprint strategies are effectively executed across Maryland, including Howard County. This suggests a structured approach to avoid past shortcomings by adopting strategies from globally top-performing education systems. Yet, the process for monitoring and evaluating these strategies seems broadly defined, raising concerns about clarity and effectiveness in their implementation.

The "All of Government" approach and AIB's mandate to ensure statewide strategy implementation underscore the reform's ambition. However, the challenge lies in operationalizing such a comprehensive plan with clear effectiveness measures. The mention of expert review teams as a support mechanism is promising, but the document lacks detail on measuring and communicating successes and failures, a crucial aspect that needs refinement.

Moreover, Howard County's tendency to add policies without alleviating other teacher responsibilities poses a significant reform challenge: managing educator workloads for effective Blueprint implementation. Although the document hints at a significant educational shift, ensuring teacher support without overwhelming them is paramount. This requires strategic planning and effective communication from the BOE—areas that have been lacking. Streamlining existing duties to accommodate new initiatives is essential for the Blueprint's success in Howard County and statewide, aiming for real improvements in student outcomes without compromising educator well-being.

*https://drive.google.com/file/d/1I_4lqLWT1nYq_PHscrAt0Z6lRAVyJXi/view

What would be your #1 goal if elected to the board?

If elected to the board, my #1 goal would be to apply more rigor to the decision-making and implementation processes of policies, with a keen focus on fiscal responsibility, ensuring the physical and psychological safety of all students, and upholding academic excellence. This comprehensive approach aims to foster an environment where financial resources are judiciously used, every student feels safe and supported, and the educational framework pushes every child to reach their highest potential.

You are running to represent district 4 this election cycle. What do you think is the biggest need in your district and what are the biggest needs for each of the other 4 districts?

Given the concerns shared by parents and teachers in District 4, the biggest need seems to be ensuring that the educational environment is conducive to both learning and teaching. This encompasses safe and reliable transportation, maintaining enriching programs like GT and music, and addressing class sizes to improve academic outcomes. Additionally, the need to balance teachers' workloads more effectively, allowing them to concentrate on educating rather than administrative burdens, is paramount. For special education families, the emphasis must be on streamlining access to necessary services, ensuring that these students are not only adequately served but thrive within our education system.

In District 4, alongside the previously mentioned priorities, there is a significant concern regarding disciplinary issues in schools. Teachers report a worsening lack of respect toward them, coupled with a feeling of being ill-equipped to manage behavioral problems effectively.

This not only impacts the learning environment but also teacher morale and student outcomes. Addressing this requires a dual approach: implementing robust support systems for teachers to manage classroom behavior and fostering a culture of respect and accountability within the student body. Equipping teachers with training and tools for classroom management and conflict resolution, alongside clear, consistent policies on discipline, will be crucial.

In other districts, while specific concerns may vary, common themes include lower class sizes, maintaining enriching programs like GT and music, and supporting special needs families. Districts with a high concentration of underserved communities will prioritize closing achievement gaps, enhancing after-school and support programs, and addressing infrastructure issues.

Recently, the Board of Education has been accused of not being transparent. What will you do to improve transparency?

Enhancing transparency within the Howard County Board of Education is crucial, especially amid concerns over accountability. My approach would involve instituting accountability measures to ensure that every department's contributions towards our educational objectives are clear and measurable. By establishing regular, comprehensive reporting and review processes, we can offer the community a transparent insight into departmental performance and the actions underway to remedy any issues. This strategy not only boosts transparency but also cultivates a culture of accountability and ongoing enhancement throughout our educational framework.

Furthermore, the tradition of engagement between the Howard County Board of Education and the County Council, through periodic meetings, has been pivotal in maintaining open, transparent conversations. I propose to widen these discussions to include select members of the County Executive's staff and representatives from the Howard County State Delegation. Expanding participation will enrich strategic planning, bringing in varied insights and promoting a comprehensive approach to managing growth and educational excellence. This holistic strategy signifies our commitment to transparency, responsible governance, and the cultivation of an educational system that reflects the high standards our community deserves.

Where would you like to see the school system in 4 years? In other words, what are your priorities if you win this term?

In the next four years, I envision a school system distinguished by its commitment to excellence and accountability, a place where innovation is matched with proof of success. We're going to take a practical approach to educational reform, piloting and carefully evaluating new programs before wide-scale implementation, ensuring our resources are invested in strategies that truly work. This method isn't just about being prudent—it's about respecting our educators and

families, making sure every dollar and every policy directly contributes to our students' success. The recent HCEA survey, showing only 30% of teachers have confidence in the current Board's leadership, is a wake-up call. It's time to restore faith in our leadership by proving we're listening, we're responsive, and we're dedicated to not just meeting but exceeding the needs of our educators and students.

Safety, trust, and academic achievement are the pillars of the environment I want for our children. Parents should have absolute confidence that their children are in safe hands and are being prepared not just for the next grade, but for life. It's about making every school in Howard County a beacon of learning and growth, where every student is encouraged to reach their full potential. We're going to ensure transparency, encourage parent involvement, and make our schools a source of community pride.

Do you think that the Student Member of the Board (SMOB) should be able to vote?

Maintaining the current policy, where the Student Member of the Board of Education (SMOB) is granted full status as a board member with the ability to vote on all issues except those pertaining to budget, personnel, or other restricted matters, represents a balanced approach. This policy effectively incorporates the student voice in the decision-making process, ensuring their perspectives are considered in areas directly affecting their education and school experience. By restricting voting on complex issues like budget and personnel, it acknowledges the specialized knowledge required for such decisions while still empowering the student representative. This model respects the valuable contributions students can make to their educational environment while also recognizing the limitations of their experience in certain operational or administrative domains. Continuing with this approach allows for meaningful student involvement in the governance of the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS), promoting engagement and representation without compromising the integrity of decisions on highly specialized matters.

What aspect (if any) would you like to change on how the Board of Education conducts its business?

If given the opportunity to influence how the Board of Education conducts its business, I would emphasize the need for increased rigor in decision-making and policy implementation. This approach would entail a thorough evaluation of potential policies through data-driven analysis, pilot programs to test the viability of proposed changes, and an iterative process that refines policies based on feedback and outcomes before full-scale implementation. Such a strategy ensures that decisions are not only grounded in solid evidence but also adaptable to real-world results, minimizing unintended consequences and maximizing positive impacts on students, teachers, and the community. By adopting a more methodical and evaluative approach, the

Board can enhance transparency, accountability, and effectiveness, leading to more thoughtful, sustainable, and impactful educational policies.

OPERATING BUDGET

Are you comfortable submitting a budget to the county executive that would fully fund the school system? Or do you think the budget should reflect the actual amount of money the school board is told it will likely receive from the County Executive and County Council?

Submitting a budget that reflects the actual amount of funding the school board is likely to receive from the County Executive and County Council is a pragmatic approach that acknowledges fiscal realities while emphasizing the need for efficient and effective use of resources. This method underscores the importance of prioritizing spending, focusing on areas that directly impact student learning and teacher support, and identifying inefficiencies within the system for correction. It encourages the administration to sharpen its focus on critical needs and ensures that the Board of Education exercises sound financial judgment, demonstrating accountability and stewardship of taxpayer dollars. With a budget as substantial as HCPSS's, approaching \$1.5 billion, recognizing and addressing built-in inefficiencies becomes crucial. By requiring a budget that aligns with anticipated revenues, we can apply pressure both on the administration to optimize resource allocation and on the board to make financial decisions that reflect our commitment to maximizing educational outcomes within our fiscal constraints. This balanced approach fosters a more sustainable financial model for the school system, ensuring that we are delivering the best possible education to our students while respecting our community's investment in their future.

HCPSS will continue to need to make cuts to meet the Blueprint's requirements. What would you cut? What revenue source would need to be leveraged to avoid making a cut?

Considering the need for HCPSS to align with the Blueprint's requirements and manage budget constraints effectively, my approach would focus on identifying areas where efficiencies can be improved, particularly by scrutinizing administrative costs. The HCPSS budget, constituting a significant portion of Howard County's overall budget, reflects our commitment to education as a priority. However, with the budget in 2024 36%* of the county's operating budget, it's crucial to ensure every dollar is utilized effectively.

Given the substantial increases in funding from 2023 to accommodate the Blueprint, following another increase from 2022 to 2023, it's evident that resources have been expanding to meet educational goals. Yet, the emphasis on managing within our substantial means—\$19,000+ spent per student annually, one of the highest rates in the

country—underscores the need for strategic financial management without excessively burdening taxpayers.

Exploring innovative solutions, such as partnerships with Howard Community College and establishing public/private collaborations, could offer alternative support mechanisms for schools without driving up costs. These creative approaches can supplement traditional funding sources, enhancing educational services and infrastructure in a financially sustainable manner. Emphasizing the efficient prioritization and utilization of available resources will be key to meeting the Blueprint's requirements and ensuring the fiscal health of HCPSS.

[*https://www.howardcountymd.gov/sites/default/files/2023-08/Approved%20FY2024%20Operating%20Budget%20Book_0.pdf](https://www.howardcountymd.gov/sites/default/files/2023-08/Approved%20FY2024%20Operating%20Budget%20Book_0.pdf), page 41 of pdf (\$778M/\$2.126B).

What legislation do you support that helps to fund HCPSS?

In addressing the question of supporting legislation that aids in funding the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS), it's essential to balance the need for adequate resources with the responsibility to manage those resources efficiently. Given the considerable portion of the county budget already allocated to HCPSS—36%*, which when combined with other funding sources amounts to an average expenditure of over \$19,000 per student annually—I am concerned about introducing new layers of legislation that could impose additional taxes on our community. Such approaches can indeed introduce more politics and maneuvering, complicating rather than solving funding issues.

My support leans towards enhancing operational efficiency within HCPSS and exploring innovative, non-tax related funding solutions. This involves backing initiatives that encourage prudent financial management, accountability, and transparency in how resources are allocated and used within the school system. Emphasizing efficiency can uncover savings and redirect funds to areas of greater need without further taxing our residents.

Moreover, I'm enthusiastic about creative solutions proposed by teachers, parents, and other stakeholders that can enhance educational services without significant additional costs. For example, the idea of leveraging Howard Community College students to support classroom services in exchange for credits presents a mutually beneficial solution. Such initiatives can provide valuable support to teachers and can enrich learning experiences for students while offering college students practical experience and academic credit. Supporting policies that facilitate these kinds of partnerships aligns with my commitment to finding resourceful ways to

address educational needs, showcasing a community-driven approach to supporting our schools.

*https://www.howardcountymd.gov/sites/default/files/2023-08/Approved%20FY2024%20Operating%20Budget%20Book_0.pdf

CAPITAL BUDGET

What would be your plan for dealing with the millions in deferred maintenance?

Dealing with millions in deferred maintenance within the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) requires a strategic and phased approach, considering the financial implications and the need to minimize disruption to the educational process. While I need to review the specifics further, the approach outlined in the FY2025 Capital Budget and the FY2026-2030 Capital Improvement Program appears to be a sound one.

How would you prioritize what schools should be renovated/replaced? What criteria would you use to make these decisions?

Prioritizing school renovations and replacements is a critical responsibility that directly impacts the safety, well-being, and educational experience of students and staff. My approach to prioritization would be methodical, transparent, and aligned with the core values of ensuring a safe, conducive, and engaging learning environment for all. Here's how I would apply the specified criteria to make informed decisions:

1. **Safety.** The paramount criterion is the physical safety of students and staff. This includes assessing the structural integrity of buildings, ensuring compliance with fire and building codes, and addressing hazardous materials (like mold).
2. **Capacity and Utilization.** After ensuring all schools meet basic safety standards, the next priority is addressing capacity issues to alleviate overcrowding and support optimal learning conditions. This includes evaluating current and projected enrollment figures against the physical capacity of school facilities. Schools operating significantly over capacity, causing strain on resources and negatively affecting the educational environment, would be next in line for renovations or replacements.
3. **Aesthetics and Learning Environment Quality.** Once safety and capacity needs are addressed, the focus can shift to improving the aesthetics and overall quality of the learning environment. This includes upgrading facilities to create more welcoming, inspiring, and engaging spaces for students and staff.

What role would you play in advocating for state funding?

In advocating for state funding, I would follow the approach previously taken by the Board of Education of Howard County, as outlined in the July 13, 2023 report on proposed 2024 Legislative Initiatives. This involves actively participating in the development and adoption of a legislative platform and engaging in advocacy through outreach to Howard County's elected representatives. By proactively influencing future legislation with potential impacts on HCPSS, I would work to ensure our schools receive the necessary support and resources. My role would entail contributing to discussions on legislative priorities, suggesting changes to statewide educational laws, and collaborating closely with the Legislative Committee. This collaborative effort aims to craft a well-informed legislative program, including a platform and proposed priorities, which will then be presented to the Howard County Delegation, ensuring our schools are positioned to successfully meet the challenges and opportunities of the future.

What is your plan for making sure the county has an adequate number of schools?

Acknowledging the effectiveness of recent audits on our capacity planning models, my plan involves leveraging these improved models to ensure Howard County maintains an adequate number of schools. I will prioritize ongoing reviews and updates to these models, ensuring they continue to accurately reflect demographic changes and enrollment trends. Using these models we can continue to anticipate and meet the future needs of our students and communities. Collaborative efforts with county officials and community stakeholders will further ensure that our educational infrastructure evolves in tandem with Howard County's growth and development.

Currently, our capital budget is prioritized by four areas: capacity needs, maintenance needs, state-identified needs, and age-based facility needs. The data is provided by the state and HCPSS. Do you think that decisions should be data driven or based on district needs?

Capital budget decisions for Howard County Public School System should indeed be data-driven, anchored in pre-identified criteria to guarantee objective and equitable allocation of resources across the district. By relying on comprehensive data provided by both the state and HCPSS, we can ensure that our investments in capacity needs, maintenance, state-identified priorities, and age-based facility requirements are accurately aligned with the actual needs of our schools. This approach not only promotes fairness but also enhances transparency and accountability in how we address the diverse needs of our district. Utilizing a data-driven strategy enables us to make informed, strategic decisions that effectively serve all students and communities within Howard County.

REDISTRICTING

Should you have to make redistricting decisions, how would you rank the three factors identified in Policy 6010 – facility utilization, community stability, and demographic

characteristics of the student population? Which one is the most important and which one is the least important?

In making redistricting decisions under Policy 6010, it's imperative to consider the intertwined importance of facility utilization, community stability, and the demographic characteristics of the student population. The primary focus would be on facility utilization to ensure that schools operate efficiently and within their capacity, optimizing resources across the county. This is followed closely by community stability, as maintaining coherent neighborhoods within schools fosters a sense of belonging and minimizes disruption for students and families. The demographic characteristics of the student population also play a critical role, especially in promoting diverse and inclusive school environments. However, it's crucial to navigate these decisions carefully to avoid impacting Title 1 school funding negatively. Ensuring that no school is redistricted in a way that would cause it to lose Title 1 funding adds a layer of complexity but underscores the commitment to equity and support for our most vulnerable students.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Can you explain how you see the board's role in ensuring that the school system complies with the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (commonly known as IDEA)?

The Board of Education plays a pivotal role in ensuring that the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) complies with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which mandates that all students with disabilities are provided with a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) tailored to their specific needs. This oversight includes the responsibility to review and update relevant policies, such as Policy 9020, to reflect the latest legal requirements, best practices, and educational strategies that support students with disabilities. The last update to Policy 9020 in 2022 signifies the Board's ongoing commitment to this responsibility. In fulfilling its role, the Board must ensure that policies not only comply with IDEA but also actively promote an inclusive educational environment that accommodates and supports the diverse needs of students with disabilities. This involves regular reviews of policy implementation, allocation of resources to special education programs, and ensuring that staff are adequately trained to provide specialized services. Additionally, the Board must engage with parents, educators, and the community to gather feedback and continuously improve the support and educational outcomes for students with disabilities, ensuring HCPSS remains aligned with IDEA's objectives.

What can the Board of Education do to improve special education besides providing additional funding?

To truly elevate special education, we must think outside the box, beyond just allocating more funds. Consider this: an innovative mentorship program where our seasoned special education teachers share their wisdom with those just starting out, fast-tracking their expertise. And why not collaborate with nursing schools? It's about leveraging every resource, every bit of knowledge we have, to enrich the lives of these students. This isn't just about education; it's about building a community that lifts everyone up, together.

During your research for becoming an HCPSS board member what did you find to be the most pressing issue for special education?

In my research on the most pressing issues facing special education within HCPSS, a significant finding was from a recent HCEA Job Satisfaction Survey, where only 34% of teachers felt there was adequate support for special education students. This concern is not isolated but indicative of broader systemic challenges, further exacerbated by the "great bus debacle of 2023-2024," which highlighted vulnerabilities in our transportation system, affecting the safety and reliability of services for special education students. The combined effect of these issues underscores the urgent need for comprehensive strategies that address both the direct and indirect factors impacting the quality of special education, highlighting the importance of robust support systems and reliable infrastructure to ensure the well-being and academic success of all students.

DIVERSITY/EQUITY/INCLUSION

What does it mean to you to "Lead with Equity"?

"To Lead with Equity" transcends merely applying an equitable lens to decision-making; it demands a robust commitment to holding the county accountable for ensuring that actions not only aim for equity but achieve tangible, meaningful outcomes. This approach necessitates a vigilant stance against superficial measures that merely tick boxes or pay lip service to the concept of equity. Instead, it requires the courage to confront and dismantle systemic injustices, the rigor to scrutinize policies and practices for their real-world impacts, and the determination to rectify disparities with actions that genuinely uplift and support every student. Anything less is not equity; it's complacency—a refusal to challenge the status quo and a failure to fulfill our moral obligation to foster a genuinely inclusive and equitable educational environment.

What voices do you feel have been most ignored when it comes to school system policies and practices?

The voices most overlooked in school system policies and practices are those of individuals who lack the resources or time to advocate for themselves. It is both condescending and

counterproductive when others presume to speak for them without ensuring their direct experiences and needs are at the forefront of the conversation.

When it comes to diversity, equity, and inclusion issues, what has HCPSS and the Board of Education done right? What have they done wrong?

While HCPSS and the Board of Education have undertaken initiatives to address diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), the tangible outcomes of these efforts are disappointingly inadequate. The student attendance report released on 3/18/2024 and the school climate survey starkly illustrate the system's failure to protect its most vulnerable populations, especially in the wake of the disastrous bus debacle of 2023-2024. This debacle disproportionately affected underprivileged and special education students, exacerbating existing inequities. Furthermore, the slight improvements noted in the school climate survey do little to mask the abysmal state of inclusivity and support for middle and high school students. These findings highlight a distressing lack of substantial progress in DEI within HCPSS, demanding a critical reevaluation of strategies and a genuine commitment to meaningful change.

SCHOOL START TIMES

Do you support the change to later school start times? Why or why not? Do you think any additional changes need to be made?

I support the shift to later school start times for high schools, recognizing the substantial body of research indicating that teenagers benefit from later starts through improved mental health, increased engagement, and better academic performance. However, considering the lingering challenges and disruptions stemming from previous schedule changes, including the aftermath of the bus debacle and ongoing transportation issues, I advocate for a temporary pause on further adjustments. This pause would allow us to fully evaluate the effectiveness of the current schedule, refine our communication strategies with parents and students, and, most crucially, guarantee the reliability and efficiency of our transportation system. Before implementing any additional changes, we must ensure a stable foundation that supports the well-being and academic success of all students without compromising their access to education.

TEACHERS

What do you think are the main issues affecting teacher retention and how will you address them?

The main issues affecting teacher retention center around the increased workload, with no reduction in previous responsibilities, coupled with the pressure of adapting to new policies, which leads to a pervasive sense of being overwhelmed and contributes significantly to

burnout. This situation is often perceived by educators as the Board "piling on," making them feel undervalued and overburdened. To address this, I advocate for an approach that includes providing targeted professional development and evaluating and potentially reducing current demands. Additionally, creating channels for open, ongoing feedback from teachers regarding the practicalities of implementing policies is crucial, as it ensures they feel heard and valued, fostering a more supportive and understanding work environment. This dialogue is essential in making informed decisions that not only respect the professional expertise of our teachers but also support their well-being, directly impacting retention positively.

More and more elementary school children are requiring mental health intervention to access their school's curriculum. HCPSS schools are not prepared. The cuts to staffing positions AND the increased class sizes will only exacerbate this looming crisis. What is your plan to address this matter as the cuts are adding to the already overburdened schools?

Addressing the rising need for mental health support in elementary schools, exacerbated by staffing cuts and increased class sizes, requires immediate action. I plan to solicit detailed input from educators and parents to inform targeted strategies, ensuring our schools are equipped to meet these critical needs effectively. This approach will lay the foundation for a responsive and supportive educational environment for all students.

SCHOOL SAFETY

How would you address the violence in our schools? What is your position on school safety and having SROs at the middle schools and high schools?

To address violence in our schools, a data-driven approach is essential, yet current data specific to HCPSS is lacking. My position on school safety and the presence of School Resource Officers (SROs) in middle and high schools hinges on gathering extensive feedback from both teachers and parents to understand community needs and concerns better. Based on this feedback, I advocate for piloting a targeted program in areas identified as having the greatest need, aiming to effectively reduce violence and ensure a safe learning environment for all students.

TRANSPORTATION/BUSSES

Given the rocky start to the school year, do you think that bus transportation continues to be an issue? Do you think students should have shorter distances to walk to school?

Yes, bus transportation remains a significant issue within our school system, further complicated by the practice of busing students to schools that are not the nearest to their homes. The current 1-mile walking radius for elementary students, particularly those in kindergarten and first grade, can be daunting and potentially unsafe, while the 2-mile radius expected of high

school students also poses challenges, especially in adverse weather conditions or due to lack of infrastructure for safe walking. Addressing these concerns requires a comprehensive review of our transportation policies and walking distance guidelines to ensure they meet the safety and accessibility needs of all students, potentially reducing reliance on bus transportation by reconsidering school assignments and enhancing walkability to nearby schools.

CURRICULUM/INNOVATION/EXCELLENCE

Howard County used to be known for its high academic standards of excellence among all Maryland county schools as well as in national rankings. Howard County's academic rigor has declined precipitously in the last 5 years. How will you seek to improve Howard County's academic rigor?

To reverse the decline in academic rigor in Howard County schools our focus must shift back to the fundamentals of education, ensuring that teachers have the freedom and time to dedicate themselves to teaching, which is their passion. Addressing this issue requires innovative strategies to reduce class sizes, thereby enhancing individual attention to students while adhering to budget limitations. This involves empowering teachers with the resources and support necessary to engage students in challenging and thought-provoking ways. By prioritizing educational quality and teacher support, we can revive Howard County's reputation for academic excellence, ensuring our schools once again stand out for their high standards both within Maryland and nationally.

With the removal of many programs in HCPSS due to budgetary reasons, what can we do as a school system to differentiate ourselves from our neighboring counties so that we can continue to provide excellent education opportunities to our students?

In light of budgetary constraints leading to the removal of programs in HCPSS, the emphasis shouldn't be on differentiating ourselves from neighboring counties through unique offerings. Instead, our focus should be on implementing and maintaining the strongest academic practices and enrichments possible within our means. By committing to excellence in education fundamentals—ensuring robust curriculum delivery, fostering innovative teaching methodologies, and prioritizing student-centered learning experiences—we can continue to provide high-quality education opportunities. This approach will naturally differentiate HCPSS by reinforcing our commitment to academic excellence and the holistic development of all students, regardless of external pressures.

What are your thoughts on how to improve food quality in the cafeterias?

Time to sample what's cooking in our school cafeterias! I'm all in for healthy, tasty food but need to catch up on the latest nutrition guidelines.

QUESTIONS NOT ASKED DURING THE FORUM, BUT SUBMITTED BY PTA MEMBERS OR FORUM AUDIENCE MEMBERS

PTA-RELATED

Other than contributing financially, how do you think PTAs can best work to improve our school system?

PTAs can significantly enhance our school system by focusing on their core goals and striving to make schools warm, welcoming spaces for all parents, particularly those who may find it challenging to engage due to time constraints. By fostering a sense of community and inclusivity, PTAs play a crucial role in supporting students and families beyond financial contributions.

EXPERIENCE

Have you served on a HCPSS Policy committee before? If so, what committee, and what was your contribution?

No.

ROLE ON THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

What external Board of Education appointment position(s) would you want to serve on and why?

I would be interested in serving on positions related to the budget. Engaging with budget-related committees or groups would allow me to contribute to ensuring fiscal responsibility and transparency, directly impacting the allocation of resources to meet the educational needs of our students effectively.

Do you view the district representative position differently than the at-large positions? If yes, then how so?

Yes, I view the district representative position differently than the at-large positions primarily in terms of responsibility. While all members make decisions affecting the entire county and are accountable for all students, as a district representative, it's my specific duty to bring forward and address issues unique to District 4.

As a district representative, how will you balance the needs of your district versus the needs of the entire school community if there is a conflict?

As a district representative, balancing the needs of my district with those of the entire school community involves careful consideration and collaboration. In case of conflict, I would prioritize solutions that offer the greatest benefit to the overall educational community while also advocating for specific district needs through dialogue and compromise, striving for outcomes that support equity and the well-being of all students.

Do you favor more centralized state control of our education model or do you prefer more localized county control?

I prefer more localized county control of our education model. This approach recognizes that the needs of our county are distinct from those of others, allowing for policies and resources to be tailored to address our specific challenges and opportunities effectively.

Board actions are made by a board not by individual members. If you end up voting against a board action that ultimately passes, what is the appropriate recourse to take? How should board members maintain the integrity of a board when they don't agree with the board's actions?

If I vote against a board action that ultimately passes, the appropriate recourse is to respect the collective decision and work constructively within its framework. To maintain the board's integrity when disagreeing, members should focus on collaborative efforts to advance the board's goals, ensuring personal dissent does not hinder overall effectiveness.

What, if anything, should be done to prevent "junior" boards? Do you think it's a detriment to possibly have 5 brand new board members and two members who have only served two years?

The existing board must be evaluated on its decisions through voting. Incumbents valued for their experience should be retained if they've performed well. New members can bring fresh approaches and help break through toxic team norms, balancing continuity with innovation.

Do you believe board of education candidates should accept donations from partisan organizations?

No, accepting donations from partisan organizations could compromise the non-partisan nature of Board of Education positions, potentially influencing decisions with political biases rather than focusing solely on the best interests of the students.

What would you focus on advocating for at the state level that impacts HCPSS?

At the state level, I will focus my advocacy on ensuring Howard County receives its fair share of funding from Maryland. This commitment is crucial for addressing the unique needs and

priorities of our community, educators, and students within the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS). After engaging deeply with the community to understand these needs and priorities more comprehensively, I will tailor my advocacy efforts to meet the specific challenges and opportunities facing HCPSS. Ensuring equitable state funding is central to supporting our educational initiatives and maintaining the high standard of education our community expects and deserves.

Are you willing to stand up to lawmakers to remove mandatory and unfunded requirements?

Yes, I am willing to stand up to lawmakers to remove mandatory and unfunded requirements, especially if doing so aligns with the best interests of the students.

OPERATING BUDGET

What is your position on increasing class sizes? Under what situation would you say it's absolutely necessary?

I am generally opposed to increasing class sizes due to the clear evidence that class size significantly impacts educational outcomes, as detailed in the research by the National Education Policy Center (<https://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/rethinking-class-size>).

How much weight will you give to student feedback on budget prioritization?

I will give some weight to student feedback on budget prioritization, recognizing students as key stakeholders. However, this will be balanced with the maturity and experience brought by educators and administrators to ensure well-rounded and effective financial decisions.

How much weight will you give to parent feedback on budget prioritization?

Parent feedback on budget prioritization will be highly valued, considering parents as crucial stakeholders with direct interest in the educational outcomes and well-being of their children. Their insights will be integrated with broader community and educational perspectives to inform balanced and responsive budget decisions.

What are the last 3 things that should be cut from the operating budget and what are the first 3 things you would cut?

The last three things that should be cut from the operating budget are teachers, gifted and talented (GT) programs, and special education resources, as these are foundational to providing quality education and supporting diverse student needs. The first three areas to consider for cuts include administrative waste, excessive contracting costs, and any non-essential expenses that do not directly contribute to student learning and well-being. Prioritizing cuts in this

manner ensures that reductions have minimal impact on the classroom and directly support the educational mission.

Do you support increasing central office and cluster staff? Would you be willing to cut all cluster level positions to hire more classroom teachers and classroom assistants?

I do not support increasing central office and cluster staff without clear evidence of their contribution to improved outcomes or reduced administrative burden on teachers. While I am cautious about cutting all cluster positions, prioritizing resources towards hiring more classroom teachers and assistants is essential, ensuring decisions are data-driven and focused on directly enhancing student learning and support.

CAPITAL BUDGET

Do you support putting High School 14 in Elkridge? If so, what will you do to move it forward on the Capital Improvement Plan?

I support pausing the construction of High School 14 in Elkridge until we address and complete all critical maintenance in existing schools. Ensuring our current facilities are in optimal condition is a priority before moving forward with new constructions in the Capital Improvement Plan.

Do you think relocatable portable classrooms are a solution to school overcrowding?

Yes, relocatable portable classrooms can be a temporary solution to school overcrowding, provided they are used judiciously as part of a balanced approach that allows us to maintain existing infrastructure and ensure adequate funding for critical needs.

REDISTRICTING

What data points would you consider when redistricting?

Response provided for a previous question.

Would you prefer to continue outsourcing redistricting guidance on a case-by-case basis, or develop a longer term in-house analytical capability?

I prefer whichever option—outsourcing on a case-by-case basis or developing in-house analytical capability—proves to be the most cost-effective and objective approach for guiding redistricting decisions.

Would you support an evaluation of the existing polygons to see what polygons make sense from a physical standpoint and what polygons may need changes to their existing boundaries in an effort to minimize driving distances and times?

Yes.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

What is your understanding of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)?

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a federal law ensuring that children with disabilities receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) tailored to their individual needs, in the least restrictive environment possible. It guarantees special education and related services to eligible students.

What will you do to ensure our ALS (Academic Life Skills students – non-diploma bound) students have access to a well-rounded education that balances curriculum as well as the transition needs of our neediest students?

I will advocate for comprehensive support and resources for ALS students, ensuring their education includes both a tailored curriculum and robust transition planning. This approach will focus on balancing academic learning with essential life and vocational skills, preparing them for successful transitions beyond the classroom.

DIVERSITY/EQUITY/INCLUSION

Are you willing to make athletics equitable? Should every high schooler who wants to play a sport be able to be placed on a free high school team, even if it isn't varsity?

High school sports should be a unifying experience, where merit guides varsity selection, however there should be a place for everyone who wants to play through intramural teams or similar options. This ensures all students can participate, improve, and enjoy the camaraderie of being part of a team.

TEACHERS

**What would you do to recruit and retain quality teachers and administrators in our county?
What can we do to keep our most tenured and experienced teachers who are considering quitting because they receive very low pay?**

I'm committed to reallocating resources within our budget to fairly compensate our veteran educators, drawing inspiration from successful models from across the country. This involves working with stakeholders to develop and implement effective retention strategies and exploring innovative solutions to keep Howard County an appealing place for teachers at all career stages. It's important to develop a comprehensive approach that addresses the multifaceted challenges teachers face, including work environment, administrative overhead, and class sizes. A supportive work environment is key, along with providing teachers the flexibility and tools necessary for classroom management and effective teaching. Drawing on successful models from similar school districts, implementing support systems such as consulting and mentor teachers for new hires can significantly improve retention. These initiatives not only assist in acclimating educators to their roles but also aim to enhance instructional practices and student outcomes, thus retaining both novice and veteran educators by fostering a community that values professional growth and leadership development.

Furthermore, addressing teacher burnout and ensuring educators feel valued are critical components in retaining a high-quality educational workforce. The profession's evolving demands necessitate a responsive approach to maintain Howard County as an attractive place for teaching professionals. Creating a culture of appreciation, offering professional development opportunities, and ensuring teachers have a voice in the decisions that affect their classrooms will help build a more supportive, rewarding, and sustainable environment for all educators. Through collaborative efforts with stakeholders, we can implement effective retention strategies that offer a comprehensive support system that nurtures and retains talented educators.

Do you think teachers should have more autonomy? How much control should teachers have over the curriculum versus central office and cluster personnel control?

Yes, granting experienced teachers more autonomy, within the constraints of a fixed curriculum and a predefined set of approved resources, can enhance the educational experience. This approach allows teachers to tailor their lessons to better suit the needs and interests of their students, fostering a more engaging and effective learning environment. However, this freedom should be balanced with accountability for educational outcomes and centralized oversight to ensure alignment with educational standards. This balance ensures that teachers' autonomy contributes positively to student learning while maintaining consistency and quality across the educational system.

Do you support allowing substitute teachers, especially long-term substitutes who have to do lesson planning, grading, etc., having access to trainings provided by the school system for

teachers? Currently, they are not allowed to register for these trainings and do not have access to the Frontline professional growth system.

I support the idea of allowing substitute teachers, especially long-term substitutes involved in lesson planning and grading, access to training provided by the school system. However, this initiative must be carefully balanced to ensure it does not detract from the resources available for existing staff benefits, training, or student programs. While enhancing the skills of substitute teachers is valuable, it's crucial that such improvements do not come at the expense of the existing staff.

CURRICULUM/INNOVATION/EXCELLENCE

Given the massive cuts to the county school budget being imposed to fund universal pre-K, what are your thoughts on how to preserve the high level of instruction and programming for HCPSS students at levels above pre-K?

Facing budget cuts to fund universal pre-K, we must tighten our belts in other areas and embrace creativity to maintain high-quality instruction and programming for HCPSS students beyond pre-K. Exploring experimental pilot programs could offer innovative solutions to navigate these financial constraints effectively, ensuring our educational standards remain uncompromised.

How can you help support Art Education, including Music, Theater, Visual Arts, etc.)?

To support Art Education without additional funding, we can get creative by leveraging community partnerships with local artists and organizations, utilizing digital platforms for virtual workshops and exhibitions, and encouraging interdisciplinary projects that incorporate arts into other subjects, maximizing existing resources to keep arts vibrant and accessible.

Do you support GT programs?

Absolutely, supporting GT programs is crucial. The participation rates in HCPSS—67% of K-5, 59% of grades 6-8, and 70% of grades 9-12—emphasize their significance. By identifying and nurturing individual talents, we can leverage these strengths to uplift more students, fostering a culture of excellence and personal development.

Do you support removing the recently implemented limitations to dual enrollment?

Yes, I support dual enrollment. Access to dual enrollment opportunities enables students to pursue advanced coursework and gain college credit while still in high school, enhancing their academic experience and preparing them for future success.

