

Trent Kittleman

- **BUDGET:** Do you support GT programs?

YES! At all levels.

- **BUDGET:** 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?

That was one of the issue I brought up in my answers in several questionnaires. However, I later learned that, for now, the plan to expand to full-day pre-K for our remaining half-day programs actually increase our funding because the State pays it's share of full-day, but not for half-day pre-K. I think it is imperative to join with other local school system in the state to negotiated relief from this Blueprint pillar. It was based on the assumption that private providers would provide at least 50% of the pre-K needs. During and since COVID, however, a great many private day-care providers have closed because they could not raise enough revenue to cover their costs.

- **TEACHERS:** 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.

Considering the fact that we seem to be losing teachers more frequently, substitutes will likely pay a larger role in education our children. I have always thought that the amount of money paid to substitutes was objectively inadequate, so I think that giving them the opportunity to access trainings would be appropriate. However, I don't know what the cost would be, and if HCPSS would incur any significant additional costs, this expense would need to be weighed against other programmatic needs.

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

This is a difficult question. I believe in teachers; they are what matters. Even if we did away with everything else in the budget, teachers could still find a space, create a lesson plan, borrow books from the public library, then get in front of their students and teach-- and the kids would learn. Today, however, the country is so sharply divided on so many social issues, that is the one area of a curriculum where strict control is necessary. When presenting a controversial issue, it must be taught without the teacher expressing or

implying either a positive or negative opinion. This can be hard when someone has deep-help convictions. But it is critical to present students with provable facts and allow them to arrive at their own conclusions.

- **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?

Yes, any student who wants to play sports should have that opportunity. The question is what requirements should be placed on team membership. There was an excellent bill in the General Assembly this year that compromised on the gender identity issue. The bill would have allowed students who identified as female to play on women's teams *other than varsity or junior varsity*. Unfortunately, the bill did not pass.

- **REDISTRICTING:** Your criteria?

The purpose of any redistricting is to balance out the numbers of students among schools that are overcrowded and those that are under capacity. My two most important considerations in designing new districts are: (1) move the fewest students possible, and (2) preserve community integrity.

- **ROLE ON THE BOARD OF EDUCATION:** 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?

There is no need for Board members always to agree on every issue. If a member expresses an opinion and votes contrary to the majority, that is actually healthy – but the Board member must graciously accept that his or her position was defeated. If the vote is close, it might be appropriate for the Chair to propose to table the vote until the next meeting and make an effort to come closer to consensus. As a Maryland State Delegate, I spent eight years successfully working with legislators across the aisle to make bills better. I also served for 18 months on the “Montgomery County Transportation Task Force II” on which there were 34 members ranging from the most liberal tree-hugger to the most ardent road advocate where we had to reach consensus; I actually served on a committee of 7 that was formed for the express purpose of coming to consensus as to what would constitute “consensus.”

- **ROLE ON THE BOARD OF EDUCATION:** Do you favor more centralized state control of our education model or do you prefer more localized county control?

I prefer more localized control and voted against almost all of the bills that the legislature passed that would substitute control from the locals to the State. From a common-sense perspective, how likely is it that a state that includes the jurisdictions of Baltimore City and Howard County can impose a successful one-size fits all plan. The Blueprint is the Legislature's most successful effort to wrest control of the public schools from the local Boards of Education. The continuing roll-out of the Blueprint will eventually highlight the magnitude of that effort.

- **ROLE ON THE BOARD OF EDUCATION:** 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?

This is the same construct that state legislators face: we had to balance the needs of our districts with the needs of the entire state. One of the things I've done to prepare is, this year, I've volunteered to serve as a Simulated Congressional Hearings judge not only for the elementary schools in my district, but also by an elementary school in each of the other districts. I also plan to take full advantage of the Board member's right and obligation to visit schools across the county. Talking with teachers, administrators, students, and parents in other communities is critical to successfully representing the whole county.

- **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?

Come up with creative ways (along with traditional ways) to redirect the focus of the Board and the Administration to academics and academic achievement. I have an idea that I would like to discuss with the Board members and other stakeholders. One of the roadblocks to true academic excellence is being so passionate about an issue that you cannot see that there is another side. This passion often precludes reasoned discussion of important topics. Students may feel intimidated to express an opinion that is not aligned with other classmates'. I'd like to propose HCPSS design a "lawyer's debate" program to be implemented, initially in social studies/history classes. Teachers would decide on a relevant topic and come up with a statement that supports just one side. One team would argue "for" the proposition; the other team would argue "against" it. The critical feature of this plan is that students would not choose which side to be on. That decision would be random, for example, by picking the sides out of a hat. What this program would do is force students to really *think*. I suspect there are students who do not believe that some of their position actually HAVE another side. We

need to find a way to bridge that gap, and I think this kind of program might be an answer.

- **TRANSPORTATION AND SCHOOL START TIMES**

1. Given the rocky start to the school year, do you think that bus transportation continues to be an issue?
2. Do you think students should have shorter distances to walk to school?
3. Do you support the change to later school start times? Why or why not? Do you think any additional changes need to be made?

1. Transportation is clearly still an issue among County residents. I wrote extensively about this issue during the start of school in my newsletter, "A Voice for Parents." One of HCCPS's most egregious mistakes, I believe, was cancelling open contracts with *local* bus companies in favor of a California company with no proven track record in providing school bus transportation. Moreover, HCPSS signed a contract with Zum that provided their drivers with significantly higher pay than we ever offered our local companies, after years of providing no increase in pay for local drivers.
2. Yes. Best practice limits walking distance to no more than one mile. But the most serious issue with the Board policy on walkers is requiring elementary school children (including pre-K students) to walk up to a mile. Safety is an overriding concern of Howard County parents and the recent move to add 3,500 students as walkers, increasing the top distance to 2 miles, and doubling the distance pre-K students now have to walk, opens the door to all kinds of safety issues – as we have already seen.
3. At the most recent Board of Ed meeting, the members engaged in a one hour and 40 minute, sometimes ugly, discussion with staff about school starting times. The Board was unhappy that staff had ignored their repeated direction to raise the earliest (high school) start time to 8:00 AM, and was concerned about the Board's reputation if staff simply ignored their directives. When this year's schedule came out, the start time had been raised only to 7:50 AM. Staff claimed that counsel had said they had a 10-minute window to comply with the Board's directive. The Board didn't agree. So, the staff was asking the Board to pass a motion indicating that they were okay with the 7:50 starting time so that the Board and the staff (Superintendent) were clearly in agreement. Otherwise, staff would feel compelled to redo the transportation plan to accommodate the 8:00 AM start. The majority of the Board seemed to be pretty clear that they wanted staff to comply with their directive. What I found unsettling was that they seemed to be more interested in the Board's reputation than in the upheaval their 8 AM start time change would wreak on families who had been through such an awful time this past fall. Dr. Lu said this very thing in words much more articulate than mine. And Dr. Chen

made it clear that leaving the start times alone this upcoming year was the right thing to do—and I agree.

- **SPECIAL EDUCATION:** What can the Board of Education do to improve special education besides providing additional funding?

Despite genuine efforts, HCPSS is failing our special education students. Among the changes we need to make and things we need to do are:

- **Undertake Strategic Planning.** We should immediately begin to plan for a complete overhaul of the way HCPSS delivers Special Education, involving *all* stakeholders in a genuine effort to devise a strategic plan that will examine all facets of our special education efforts including looking for answers that have worked in other counties or states. I have listened to a number of teachers and parents during the last year who have identified specific concerns (such as how special ed students are grouped for their pull-out classes). As a state Delegate for eight years, I met with constituents almost every day and the most frequent groups I heard from were advocates for special education and special education teachers who came down every year hoping for some relief from the overburdensome paperwork requirements of the job that divert their time from teaching.
- **Share Health Costs with the County.** A significant part of the special education budget goes to employing health care professionals. Health care is the responsibility of the state and county governments. It is time to talk with the County Council about assuming certain of the special education health care expenses that are currently funded in the education budget. It is possible that there may be economies of scale found in combining these services.
- **Shift the “Burden of Proof.”** For several years, our formerly bipartisan Howard County delegation unanimously approved, and the BOE supported, a bill to shift the burden of proof from the parents to the school system in cases where the parents feel they must take HCPSS to court to get satisfaction. These cases are almost unique to decisions involving IEP (Individual Education Plans). When parents know they can afford to challenge such decisions, the issues tend to get resolved without legal recourse, saving both the parents and the school a good deal of money.

- **REDISTRICTING**

The purpose of any redistricting is to balance out the numbers of students among schools that are overcrowded and those that are under capacity. Having fought alongside my constituents against the inexplicable proposal to move over 7,000 students, back in 2019,

my two most important considerations in designing new districts are: (1) move the fewest students possible, and (2) preserve community integrity.

- **CAPITAL BUDGET:** What is your plan for making sure the county has an adequate number of schools?

I would follow the successful model in Prince Georges County. They recently used a Public Private Partnership to build six brand new schools in just three years. Although P-3s do not come without concerns, they address the one thing that we most desperately need: building schools quickly. With a more dependable path for funding school construction, the Board should have more funding for maintenance that would allow them to create an objective 5-year plan identifying priorities that do not change from year to year. Another action that would reduce the construction costs by 15%-30% is reinstatement of the 25% rule for prevailing wage as it pertains to school construction. It is also important to create objective measures for determining maintenance priorities and stick to them