



2023 NONPARTISAN FAIRFAX COUNTY VOTER GUIDE

CANDIDATES FOR School Board



Who will ensure that our schools welcome all students and provide them an exceptional education?

September 4, 2023

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About the Sponsors

The three sponsors are nonpartisan groups who do not endorse or oppose candidates. We developed the questionnaire to educate voters and other community members interested in public education. ACLU People Power Fairfax published a similar Voter Guide during the last election cycle.

- **ACLU People Power Fairfax** is a grassroots organization that advocates for equal justice and equitable treatment of all members of our community, including undocumented immigrants, regardless of race and ethnicity.
- **4PublicEducation** is a grassroots advocacy group championing public schools as the cornerstone of a healthy democracy; it seeks to protect the right for every child to an exceptional education.
- **Stand and Deliver Virginia** is a grassroots educators’ group committed to the inclusive and respectful education of Virginia students.

About the Questionnaire

We submitted a questionnaire to all candidates for the Fairfax County School Board (SB), regardless of their party affiliation, asking for their positions on policies that have elicited passionate concern at SB meetings. This Voter Guide includes all candidates who responded to the questionnaire by August 30 known to be seeking At Large or individual District seats on the SB.

The responses below are verbatim with the exception that the formatting has been modified for consistency.

Topics Covered

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|-------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| Question 1 | Mental Health Needs | Question 8 | Special Education Services |
| Question 2 | School Safety | Question 9 | School Resource Officers |
| Question 3 | Teacher Shortage | Question 10 | Joint Environmental Task Force |
| Question 4 | Factual and Representative Teaching | Question 11 | Alternatives to College Prep |
| Question 5 | Book Banning and Parental Rights | Question 12 | Charter Schools |
| Question 6 | Addressing Disparity | Question 13 | Restoring Civility |
| Question 7 | LGBTQ+ Students | | |

Candidate Responses

AT LARGE

Responding Candidates: Maureen Brody, Peter Gabor, Kyle McDaniel,
Ryan McElveen, Ilryong Moon

Did Not Respond: Cassandra Aucoin, Sandra Davis, Ahmed Hussein,
Linda Pellegrino

QUESTION 1: MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS: *There are several factors that have adversely impacted the mental health of students, teachers and staff in public schools, including bullying, active shooter drills, culture wars and the pandemic. What initiatives will you champion to address mental health needs in the Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) system?*

Maureen Brody	<p>More than what you have named, kids today are marinated in a culture of confusion and fear. Children and young adults need stability first and foremost so their developing minds can absorb and retain the information they need to acquire skills and decision-making ability. The schools must be a safe place—on the campus, in the curriculum, and in their assignments.</p> <p>Our schools need to be equipped for physical safety, with metal detectors at the main entrance, a “through-the-office” visitors welcome path, and exterior door alarms so any left ajar can be addressed immediately. Our elementary school had a bomb scare. After the principal botched the whole thing, I went to the office and found the emergency response manual on the shelf with the pages still cello-wrapped. Never even unwrapped! We will formalize training and accountability for safety and will reward principals for compliance.</p> <p>Schools must stop confusing and scaring young minds. We will stop peddling race- and gender-based suspicion as part of the curriculum and social/emotional learning effort.</p> <p>Stress is part of life, but too much stress at too young an age is disabling and leads to acting out. We will end the continuous testing approach to education, which eats into actual learning for the sake of king data. Additionally, assignments based on digital resources create unnecessary stress, because those tools often don’t work well or are inaccessible, causing delays and even panic.</p> <p>The new Students Rights & Responsibilities Handbook proposes extended punishments for kids who have a rational response to the stress the schools and other adults are causing. I suggest we attack the disease to alleviate the symptoms, not the children’s responses.</p>
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<p>Peter Gabor</p>	<p>FCPS does provide some measures to help with student and staff mental health for issues which have already arisen. I would like to see us be proactive in looking over topics we have control over:</p> <p>The school should be a place that students can count on. Regularity of schedule is part of this, especially at the outset of the school year. Last school year, only 4 of the first 14 weeks were "normal" five day weeks at my school. Is it not the clean house that is inherently more welcoming than the one with much clutter? Contrast this with the 2010-11 school year where 10 of the first 14 weeks were "normal"!</p> <p>I think the extra non-curricular testing students are exposed to within a class increases their angst and detracts from the class, especially when access to the testing details are difficult to come by. I suggest significant limits to non-curricular testing and access to test details.</p> <p>It used to be that summer was a time for recharging one's batteries - work hard, play hard - one of the perks of being a student or teacher. Ten years ago summer was 10 weeks, but now it is only 8 weeks. What do we have to show for that half month that the school district appropriated? Are our children better educated? Are our teachers more rested at the end of the summer? I'm thinking these are topics that bear visitation.</p>
<p>Kyle McDaniel</p>	<p>There are two different ways to address the critical mental health needs within our schools. First, we have the more long-term needs that will require heavy investment and cooperation across all levels of government and partnering with various private and non-profit entities. This requires strong leadership, clear planning, measurable goals, and actionable accountability and follow through. I call this a wraparound, vertical service model: we involve all levels of government, and provide wrap around services in schools. Implementing this would require investments to hire more mental health professionals. One way we could accomplish this is through reinvesting surplus funds.</p> <p>Secondly, there are various low hanging fruit we can pull from to immediately address this need: mentor programs among peer groups, mental health resource symposiums in conjunction with Back to School nights, increasing employee healthcare coverage for mental health treatment, launching a "Check on Your Buddy" campaign to encourage kids to talk to each other. The list goes on.</p> <p>The challenge we face is that mental health is not a school isolated issue; it doesn't start when a person walks into a school, and conversely it doesn't stop when they leave a school. To truly address this, and not simply pay lip service, it's going to take investment, cooperation, collaboration, and leadership to muster the resources of many actors. As a note, addressing the mental health needs within FCPS must be done through an equitable lens, using the One Fairfax model. It would be unacceptable for resources and initiatives to be inequitably distributed across the County.</p>
<p>Ryan McElveen</p>	<p>FCPS has taken important steps to improve the mental health of students, from initiatives that I helped institute as a Board member — including annual Mental Health and Wellness Conferences, school-based stress less weeks, a suicide phone and text line, and hiring a significant number of new psychologists and social workers — to the more recent effort to provide free mental health teletherapy.</p> <p><i>Continued next page</i></p>

	<p>However, the overarching problem in the current system is that resources are only provided to students who request them. It is critical that every student has at least one annual mental health screening check and subsequently has continued access to professional staff and resources. I propose offering mental health services for every student annually. Every student deserves the opportunity to meet with a qualified professional at least once, and if every student takes part in these meetings, it will remove the stigma of doing so.</p> <p>Additionally, the mental health of teachers and staff continues to be neglected. Overburdened by workload, class sizes, professional development, and low wages, our school-based staff have few outlets for addressing their mental health, especially given the difficulties with the health insurance provider transition to Cigna this year. Just like with students, I would propose that each staff member has access to at least one mental health check-in with a professional in school buildings annually.</p>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Ilryong Moon</p>	<p>Tackling the mental health challenges in Fairfax County Public Schools means we must (1) continue adding resources (counselors, psychologists, social workers) to provide the preventative counseling, treatments and services students and families need, (2) provide teachers with a fair compensation package to restore the respect and dignity of work for our most important instructional resources, and (3) improve teacher working conditions by reducing class sizes, expanding planning time, and eliminating non-essential (mandatory) tasks, meetings, and trainings.</p> <p>As a Board member, I will work with families, connecting them with Fairfax County Public Schools' Office of Family and School Partnerships and the tools they offer to help families prepare their children for school. Additionally, we also need to fully staff our Office of Family and School Partnerships to effectively serve the ever-increasing needs of our communities. A fully staffed Office means that we can commit the needed time and resources to reach out and connect with our communities, introducing them to our vast array of services offering assistance to ensure student success.</p> <p>In addition to the stressors mentioned in the question, there may be other factors impacting the mental health of our students, teachers and staff that we must continue to investigate and address. For example, students are likely to feel pressure to get good grades, attend the best colleges, all while coping with unhealthy family and peer relationships and strained financial situations. Continuing to put resources toward identifying students that are at risk in these situations and getting them the help to address their stressors leads to healthier graduates and productive citizens.</p> <p>Addressing all of the above, however, requires a re-dedication and commitment from not only the Fairfax County School Board but also our partners at the County level, the Board of Supervisors, to address the additional funding needed to continuously address these evolving issues and challenges.</p>

QUESTION 2: SCHOOL SAFETY. *The prospect of an active shooter is a serious safety concern. What steps do you recommend to ensure safety for everyone in our schools?*

<p>Maureen Brody</p>	<p>Metal detectors at the front entrance can help, as can alarmed doors. But teachers need formal training and practice at emergency response. There should be door blocks for each classroom so teachers can safely shelter students in place. Armed school resource officers can be of value, but they must be trained specifically in mass-shooting response, which includes sharpshooting as well as containment and conflict de-escalation.</p> <p>Since prevention is the best strategy, school staff must be educated on the signs of mental anguish and dissociation, which are typically precursors to an attack. Parents also must be educated on the signs their child might become a mass shooter and the steps to take. While discouraging the “report on your neighbor” mentality, all who are involved in the schools should be encouraged to alert a trusted adult about threatening social media posts or other red flags. And there must be a process for investigating these alerts that presumes the person reported is innocent while still taking full stock of the situation.</p>
<p>Peter Gabor</p>	<p>I think FCPS has done reasonable things for the safety of its students and staff, such as screening areas and sign-ins for most locations, external doors locking automatically, security cameras both within and outside schools, and active threat drills. The militarizing of schools also has a drawback in that it tends to alienate former students, whom the district now views with suspicion. As a result, there is less return of prior students sharing information with current ones, which had been valuable for both students and teachers.</p> <p>One thing I'd like to examine along the lines of safety is the communication between the school and the FCPD in the rare cases where there is some unplanned school wide incident. For example, several years ago, one morning before school started, a motorist decided to become intimately acquainted with a utility pole, and while the motorist survived, the utility pole did not, so electrical power to the FCPS school was lost, and security measures were compromised. Traffic locked up in the surrounding areas, and the FCPD was dispatched to handle traffic flow. They did not appear to have knowledge about the school and directed all traffic uniformly, even though to my thinking, this is exactly when the school was most vulnerable. With good communications between FCPS and the FCPD, traffic could have been strategically directed to maximize the staff on hand for the children in the darkened school.</p>
<p>Kyle McDaniel</p>	<p>I will parse out my response into two sections: direct, and indirect.</p> <p>Direct: Let me first state what I do not support: militarizing our schools through more police and extensive physical security measures. Our schools are for teaching, turning them into glorified fortresses is not conducive to teaching.</p> <p>I have called for the establishment of a task force by FCPS to leverage the collective intellect and resources in our communities to produce a practical list of recommendations. My vision is that these recommendations can then be implemented and shared with school systems across the country for their consideration. For example: evidence-based intervention, physical security, gun safety information for families, mental health systems, suicide prevention resources, etc.</p> <p>Indirect: I firmly believe that as the 10th largest school system in the country, and the wealthiest jurisdiction, we have a unique ability to lend our voice and activism to lobbying our state lawmakers for commonsense gun reforms. We need to do a better job in Richmond during the General Assembly session, and I will be part of that effort.</p>

Ryan McElveen	<p>The most important thing a school system should do is provide a safe environment for its students and staff. Unfortunately, there is no single fix to prevent disasters, even though vendors constantly try to sell the school system on new products. Ensuring safety requires a multi-layered approach to protection – from erecting physical barriers to providing mental health services. At the same time, the system must strike a careful balance to ensure that schools are safe, welcoming, and inclusive without becoming jail-like fortresses.</p> <p>In the aftermath of both the Sandy Hook and Parkland shootings, the School Board commissioned studies on school safety. The study following Parkland, which was released in 2019, called for important fixes, including, among other things, initiating a countywide electronic door access system, replacing outdated dual-keyed door locks, securing school vestibules, and hiring additional school-based mental health support staff.</p> <p>While the electronic door system, door lock replacement, and mental health support staff hiring were completed, unfortunately not all school vestibules were secured. This lapse is frustrating, as the pandemic presented the perfect opportunity to complete facility enhancements while students were out of the building.</p> <p>For next steps, the system must complete the vestibule projects. I would also recommend embarking an effort to ensure that all school exterior window glass is bullet proof. Finally, we should always work to continue bolstering our mental health supports. I do not recommend adding metal detectors or increasing SRO presence beyond current levels, as we want to avoid militarizing our schools.</p>
Ilryong Moon	<p>First, we continue taking steps to address the mental health needs of our students so that they do not become so lost that they feel their only recourse is lashing out and invoking violence against their own classmates, teachers and staff. Second, we must protect against the threat from an outside person by hardening the security in place to protect against unauthorized access (entrance) to the school facilities – this is something Fairfax already takes very seriously and has done a very effective job at containing but it is not a task that is ever “done.” Physical (perimeter) security is an ever-evolving activity requiring constant vigilance due to the access to our facilities that the public has for local community meetings, school sporting events, and after school activities. To complement the physical security, we must use cameras and recording technology to protect against any lapses in coverage when it comes to physical security so that potential breaches are identified immediately and handled by school security and the administration. Implementing these strategies and communicating our plans with the affected populations and surrounding communities will not only help us minimize the risk of violence from within and without but it instills confidence that Fairfax is taking decisive actions to ensure our schools are safe spaces. Furthermore, we need to provide adequate training for all adults in the buildings and prepare our students on how to respond in case of an active shooter situation.</p>

QUESTION 3: TEACHER SHORTAGE. *We have a growing teacher shortage. How will you address this issue?*

Maureen Brody	<p>Teaching is a profession and must be treated as one. That includes providing safety in the classroom, appropriate resources, a living wage and reasonable benefits. But we must also attract those whose profession is not “teaching.”</p> <p>We have a large pool of potential teachers, such as former military and retired business and science personnel, who would be willing to offer their knowledge to the next generations but who don’t want to monkey with a dysfunctional system. They don’t want to have to take classes on microaggression or be falsely accused of bias and subjected to reprogramming. They don’t want to be assaulted in the classroom or hall, and they don’t want to teach students that the culture of their parents should be thrown out with the trash. If we would—and I will if elected—reform the school system’s focus and welcome experts to impart their knowledge, I think you would see a threefold improvement:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The kids would become more engaged, and academic outcomes would improve2. The budget wouldn’t have to cater to people who are trying to build a nest-egg, because many teachers would be serving in a second-career capacity3. FCPS could focus its most intensive recruiting on special education, ESL and other specialty areas where a degree in education proper has real value.
Peter Gabor	<p>On the education front, this is the single most important issue facing the nation. Fundamentally, teaching must be attractive to prospective employees, but violence, increasing class sizes, administrative overreach, and, most importantly, flat compensation (see https://www.epi.org/publication/teacher-pay-penalty-2022/) speak against it. The classic suggestion of smaller class sizes requires more funding since all staff, not just teachers, are being pushed unsustainably. I think FCPS should undertake a search for a long-term viable way forward. I am certain there is no pleasant solution to this problem, but I am sure that if FCPS doesn't actively pursue it, market forces will deliver something that is even less palatable.</p> <p>Hiring teachers from alternate pathways (eg. from industry or out of state), Virginia allows districts to credit the experience of Career and Technical Educators more than otherwise (VA Administrative Code 8, Agency 20, Chapter 410). I suggest FCPS not ignore section III.D.1 in its own Regulation 4625 and follow state allowance. The actual act of hiring on to FCPS is done through HR. Although Regulations 4610 and 4625 cover salary and benefits, for alternate pathway hires it's a negotiation process, but it's one-sided since the regulations have interpretive leeway, are generally not shared with the prospective employee, and are sometimes not adhered to. The process can be opaque, and it can seem that HR is an adversary rather than on the side of the desired hiree. I think it makes a lot of sense to have a union rep at the table with HR.</p>

<p>Kyle McDaniel</p>	<p>Our teachers face unprecedented challenges, and the School Board needs to carefully manage this situation. Happy, healthy, respected teachers lead to happy, educated kids. We need to craft policies that truly show how much we value our teachers.</p> <p>In the short term, we need to explore retention bonuses and increasing the maximum teacher pay band, which is the second lowest in the region. This will encourage tenured teachers to stay longer, and their experience, mentorship, and guidance can help new teachers starting out their career. Bolstering the Teachers for Tomorrow program would also help. I have repeatedly heard from teachers about the duplicative nature of reporting and administrative work they are tasked with. This needs to be addressed and remedied.</p> <p>It goes without saying that we also need a fair and equitable collective bargaining agreement, and I would work with the bargaining units to make that happen.</p> <p>Mental health, as outlined in answer #1, also touches on this issue.</p> <p>Finally, transparency and communication will both go a long way. If we want to know what teachers need, we need to engage them in a meaningful manner, through teacher associations, directly in classrooms, surveys, etc. Part of my leadership style is going to meet people where they work to see the challenges, they face every day. This engagement must be authentic and meaningful. I want to talk with teachers and hear from them, in their own words, what they need.</p>
<p>Ryan McElveen</p>	<p>Our teachers are unquestionably our most important asset. Having a wife who teaches and a father who taught in FCPS for many years, I understand the myriad struggles our teachers face and the need to restore the respect of our society for the education profession. To address our ability to attract and retain a robust, exceptional, and diverse teaching and administrative force, I will address:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Employee compensation, recruitment, and retention – We must compensate teachers at a level that recognizes their contributions to society. FCPS, like districts nationwide amid the national teacher shortage, is struggling to attract teachers, particularly in specialized fields, and it is critical that we retain the teachers in whom we invest. 2. Building improvements – We must address our capital budget and increase the county’s school bond allocation, which impacts our educational environments. Our backlog of renovations and preventive maintenance is one of our greatest challenges. 3. Working Conditions – We must provide teachers with useful professional development that lets them to hone their skills, provides unencumbered planning time, and allows the autonomy to make their classrooms come alive. 4. Class sizes – Class sizes have reached a tipping point, and it’s time to reevaluate the class size regulation. 5. Instructional programs – We will need to successfully implement the new strategic plan without increasing teacher workload. Instruction is where our teachers help Fairfax stand out from other school districts, and we need to ensure that teachers retain the autonomy to engage in project-based learning that embraces the four Cs (critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity) while pushing back against federal and state pressures to teach to standardized tests.

Ilryong Moon

Teacher shortages are a concern facing not only Fairfax County Public Schools but the whole nation. Four key factors affecting our ability to recruit and retain teachers are: (1) compensation package, (2) collegial support and mentoring, (3) instructional autonomy and working conditions, and (4) adequate time for personal and professional development.

Young people out of college have many other options that are more financially attractive than becoming a teacher. While we may not be able to offer recent college graduates the top salaries, we need to enhance our overall compensation package to a more competitive level, including special provisions for new teachers who settle here in Fairfax County such as relocation expense reimbursement and hiring and retention bonuses. Our current approach using modest, incremental increases is not addressing the issue in its entirety and, ultimately, is not a winning strategy for recruiting and retaining the best talent. We need to rethink our entire mindset about the teaching profession. If we can attain the compensation structure and other bold plans I have outlined here, we will see the best college graduates entering the world of education. Achieving this, however, requires a whole government approach and commitments by federal, state, and local governments and district school boards are needed to provide the funding for a new approach. Investing in teachers is an investment in the foundation of the nation and our future.

New teachers also need more mentorship. Providing new teachers with the support they need is critical to retaining them; many new teachers struggle in dealing with parents or even administrators. They should be provided with access to mentors readily available either within the school building or outside. They also need more mental health support.

We should also work with the local governing body and the state government to secure more affordable workforce housing in the area. Housing is just so expensive and many of our teachers, especially young teachers, are unable to live in the area where they teach.

We can explore ways to encourage more of our students to study education and then return to us for a career in teaching. Expanding our Teach for Tomorrow program and providing more part-time and summer employment opportunities for those students willing to return to us as teachers is a good starting point.

We must also be prepared to make necessary adjustments to the compensation package based on the changing market conditions, thus ensuring our total compensation packages stay market competitive with other school districts and the private sector.

QUESTION 4: FACTUAL AND REPRESENTATIVE TEACHING. *Will you explicitly commit FCPS to teach history that is factually accurate, inclusive and age appropriate? How will you work to ensure that literature taught and available in libraries is representative and respects our diverse community of students, staff and families?*

<p>Maureen Brody</p>	<p>When I attended Fairfax County Public Schools (I am a lifelong resident), everything was taught through the lens of the Constitution and Declaration of Independence—how those two documents reflect the foundations of the country, the hope for the country, and the blueprint for our progress.</p> <p>We learned the sins and successes of the nation; the essential contributions of the Indian tribes, black slaves and freemen, whites of all religions, and European, Latin American and Asian immigrants. I recall vividly in fourth grade seeing films of life on the Nile, learning about the “company store” in of all places Music class, and being confused as a child when I first saw pictures of the tenements in New York and the dichotomy between wealth and poverty as we studied the “Roaring Twenties.”</p> <p>The School Board does not set curriculum, but we do set the tone and guide the superintendent’s office, and we do appoint the advisory committees who assist the chief academic officer in selecting the curriculum. The School Board also approves the money, so there is power of the purse, which can be used to ensure resources in the schools reflect the truth and diversity of our nation’s development. And, yes, I do explicitly commit to a curriculum that is factually accurate, inclusive, and age appropriate. In fact, it’s one of the main reasons I am offering my services to the School Board.</p>
<p>Peter Gabor</p>	<p>Of course we should teach factually and age appropriate information. And of course it is impossible to teach everything. I’m an American, and I love my country. It is vital to pass this commonality (the American heritage) to all of our students. In particular, there is a core curriculum of (US or Virginia) History that all should learn. The remaining time should be enhanced in the way that the teacher (or local school community) sees as relevant.</p> <p>In researching responses to the questions, my thinking was that I’d like to know the current situation before I can really have an intelligent conversation about a topic, and part of that is to know the currently applicable policies, regulations, and laws. I also appreciate it when someone lets me know where to find information, which is why I cite specifics in the prior question and the rest of my responses.</p>
<p>Kyle McDaniel</p>	<p>Whitewashing history is unacceptable to me. We need to teach kids factual and wholistic history, regardless of how inconvenient it may be. This is accomplished by informed curriculum developed by experts, and literature chosen by librarians and other qualified personnel.</p> <p>I would encourage librarians to curate literature collections that fit the diversity of their schools, in conjunction with teachers. Librarians are the experts, and we should follow their guidance in matters pertaining to books.</p>

<p>Ryan McElveen</p>	<p>I explicitly commit to ensuring that FCPS teaches history that is factually accurate, inclusive, and age appropriate. School curricula – and K-12 education, more broadly – have come under attack by the Youngkin administration. Earlier this year as part of VDOE’s listening tour on the newly proposed history standards, I joined several former FCPS School Board members in sending a letter expressing concerns that the new standards are rife with historical errors, fail to tell history in an inclusive way, and de-emphasize conceptual understanding and critical thinking skills in favor of rote memorization and low-level thinking. We also expressed our deep concerns about the lack of racial, gender and religious diversity, as well as an underrepresentation of Indigenous peoples. The complete removal from the standards of the term “fascism” was also deeply concerning.</p> <p>As elaborated below, I will also work to ensure that literature in schools is representative and respects our diverse community by ensuring that the choices of librarians are respected, books are not banned, and parents have the option to opt-out students from specific literary works.</p> <p>I will continue to engage in this kind of advocacy as a School Board member through our Board’s legislative program. I oversaw the Board’s legislative program as state legislative liaison for eight years and worked to develop strong advocacy language on curricular issues – I will continue that work if elected again.</p>
<p>Ilryong Moon</p>	<p>Yes. I believe Fairfax County Public Schools has always sought to teach factually accurate history that is inclusive and age appropriate. We will continue doing so and establish a School Board Policy with clear directives for the Superintendent and staff. We will resist attempts from the State government and pressure from outside the system to do otherwise. We need to be open to considering incorporating, in our history curriculum, what our community believes to be taught as long as the content remains factually accurate and has instructional value. Input from community members, staff, and students should be regularly sought.</p>

QUESTION 5: BOOK BANNING AND PARENTAL RIGHTS. *The issue of banning books and calls for expanded parental rights have become hot topics in school districts. How would you handle these issues? How does FCPS encourage parents' involvement in their children's education and what, if anything, needs to change?*

<p>Maureen Brody</p>	<p>The chief academic officer has primary responsibility for the curriculum, which includes the selection of books. That means some books are chosen, some books are not chosen, and some books are retired from use. Books that are retired from use are not “banned” but, rather, removed from the online library and school shelves for a variety of defensible reasons.</p> <p>There are books that include pornographic depictions for which I would be arrested and charged if I presented them to a minor in any setting other than as a teacher in school. That’s a problem. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=b6Xm4AX25tE and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8wa3DuSiqgo&t=5821s if you want the full “picture.”</p> <p>I think there are better ways to educate youth on the broad array of thought, self-perception, perspective and sensitivity than using sexually explicit language and pictures. When I attended Fairfax County schools, we were exposed to a selection of books that included incest (Oedipus), depression (Emily Dickinson), love (the Brownings), gallantry (King Arthur), pioneer families (Wilder and Cather), mixed-race and broken families (George Washington Cable), the thought of the black power movement (What Country Have I) and many more. We didn’t dwell on those topics, but they were part of the quilt of knowledge we were constructing.</p> <p>As for parental involvement in their children’s education, I’m for it. Schoology is one, limited method. Parent coffees, conferences, weekly open communication on behavior and grades are others. There need to be a variety of touch points since there are many lifestyles that need to be accommodated. One major tell-tale problem is FCPS’s preference for keeping secrets from the parents. In fact, the School Board is suing (spending hundreds of thousands of tax dollars) to keep secrets from parents. That is ridiculous. If a school administrator or teacher thinks a parent is dangerous to a child’s welfare, they should report that to the authorities. If not, the parents are the child’s first and primary protectors and educators and must be given the respect due to that office.</p>
<p>Peter Gabor</p>	<p>I think that parents should be strongly involved in the education of their child or children, especially in reviewing whether there are concerns regarding their child's schooling that they should be aware of, checking that assignments are done, and also guiding students in decision making when appropriate. For example, there are so many interesting activities to take part in, and part of the parent role is to discuss with their child which activities are reasonable, and which will be stretching them too thin. Regarding book challenges, there is specific procedure in place, Regulation 3009, that is specific on this matter and does not involve the School Board (except in the case of challenges to decisions).</p>
<p>Kyle McDaniel</p>	<p>I do not support giving anyone unilateral authority to ban a book, regardless of their relationship to the school system. We have a process in place to review books, and it involves experts in the respective field. This process needs to be respected and followed.</p> <p>“Parental rights” entered the lexicon in 2021 as a political campaign slogan, designed for political purposes. That said, parents have always been welcome in their schools, and encouraged to get involved. Feedback and communication have always been encouraged. We do need to do a better job talking about this, and encouraging parents to be involved to whatever extent they choose. I would encourage more consistent, school-based engagement in conjunction with the various parent/teacher organizations.</p>

Ryan McElveen	<p>In Fairfax County, parents have the option to opt out their students from materials they find to be offensive. Thus, there is no need for books to be banned from classrooms or libraries. In 2012, our School Board faced a challenged material complaint about <i>Beloved</i> by Toni Morrison, and I served on the School Board committee that voted against banning that book. FCPS has a very clear process to address challenged materials – with items reviewed first by staff and then by Board committees – and that process does not need to be changed.</p> <p>As the parent of a kindergartener and a class parent, I have found FCPS to be welcoming of my views. I feel intimately involved in the education of my daughter, with weekly updates on what is being taught in the classroom and frequent invitations to visit and read to her class. Our PTA is actively involved in the school, and we are constantly working closely with school leadership to host events and fundraisers and advocate on issues important to the community. I will work to ensure that this kind of active parental involvement is taking place in all schools.</p>
Illyong Moon	<p>I do not believe in book banning and support a process that welcomes and invites parental input in our/their students' education. Our parents are our partners and we want to work with them and consider their opinions on their children's education when developing policy and budgets. With that in mind, we must also acknowledge that our community members are not all professional educators and, as a School Board, we must respect our teachers and professional staff and rely on them to ensure our instruction carries out the school system's policies. The community should also consider and respect our professional educators hired to develop our curriculum and understand that our teachers are doing their jobs per established curricula, policies, and regulations. Healthy discussion and debate should always be encouraged so that everyone understands and respects the decisions made. There needs to be better communication on the roles each party plays in our students' education.</p>

QUESTION 6: ADDRESSING DISPARITY. *Do you endorse the One Fairfax and School Trust policies? How will you lead the School Board in confronting racial and social inequities in all FCPS policies and practices? How will you address the disparity in academic achievement measures and discipline, and improve language access?*

Maureen Brody	<p>Discipline: The first thing to recognize is that the schools cannot make up for parental inadequacies—for example, if a child is not raised to be courteous, respectful or behaved, there isn't much the school can do except remove a disruptive student from the classroom. For example, there is a current conundrum in FCPS, as is demonstrated by the new Student Rights & Responsibilities Handbook. Recognizing that there is a behavioral problem, FCPS came up with a new hierarchy of correction and punishment for students. I was at that working session and was stunned because there was no consideration of the root cause of the problem—the kids are being driven nuts! They are having a rational response to a system that is overloaded with stress stimuli and little promise of future relief. I asked, "What more would these kids need to do to demonstrate that they hate school and hate what's being served up to them by society?" I received blank stares. Let's create an environment students think is worthy of their intellect and time.</p> <p>Additionally, the schools cannot truly discipline a child, for there are laws preventing those measures. So what can the schools do? We can start with creating a formal, regimented environment. Contrary to popular pedagogical theory, students do NOT thrive in an open, amorphous environment where they are given more authority and fewer strictures.</p> <p><i>Continued next page</i></p>
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	<p>Children thrive when there are boundaries that they can bang up against, rules that are clear and uniformly enforced, and rewards for merit. Currently, the rewards are paltry, the boundaries are soft, the rules are unclear, and violations are met with “accommodated” responses. It’s a fail.</p> <p>One Fairfax: The School Board has been an abysmal failure at this. I was PTA president at Lee (now Lewis) and watched FCPS allow white flight, causing student numbers to plummet, money to dry up, and classes to vanish. There should be no difference in the education available between Langley and Lewis or Madison and Falls Church. But there is. That can and must be corrected.</p> <p>Language access: The first thing a child coming from another country should be taught is English. They are not going to be able to function without it. Once they have facility with English, they can be mainstreamed into the rest of the school day and given remedial assistance to catch them up to grade level. FCPS does have programs for this. They just need to be used well.</p> <p>Academic achievement: Much of the success in this area comes from the home, where parents engage with kids on what they are learning. The schools can help by being transparent with the parents about what is being taught, what is assigned, what is due and when, and where there are problems. That said, there is a ton of time wasted in the school day on social-emotional projects that do NOT promote academic success. All the data show that, as school time has been diverted to these social engineering projects, academic performance has declined. Let’s act on the data and eliminate that garbage from the curriculum and get back to teaching English, math, the scientific method, history/geography and foreign languages.</p>
<p>Peter Gabor</p>	<p>I take the view that the purview of FCPS and the School Board is very narrow: to prepare its student population to be the future adult Americans. If it falls outside this scope, I am or would be skeptical about FCPS involvement. In particular, FCPS should not be in the "law enforcement" business. Therefore, I support Policy 1445, the "Trust Policy", which takes pains to ensure that it does not violate Federal Law (Section IV.1.A). Regarding language, I think it's great that FCPS makes materials available in multiple languages. As translation services/software improves, it may be possible in the future to have a bulk of materials translated.</p> <p>Fairfax County passed OneFairfax, in conjunction with FCPS (about 2016-7), so FCPS is bound to honor it. My position is that if there are iniquities, then address them because they are iniquities. For example, FCPS should provide (a path for) access to an AAP for all qualified students because that will maximize their education, which is what FCPS is supposed to be all about.</p>

<p>Kyle McDaniel</p>	<p>I endorse One Fairfax and School Trust policies. This starts by viewing decisions through a One Fairfax lens, and understanding how decisions will impact kids and schools. Another step is to analyze programs and resources across schools, in an effort to correct the inequities that exist across Fairfax County. I believe the best way to confront the various inequities is to recognize they exist, and work with stakeholders to craft concrete policies to correct them.</p> <p>During this current School Board term, the word “equity” became controversial, mostly because of a lack of communication. Equity and excellence can and do co-exist. Equity is nothing more than recognizing that marginalized groups need more resources to enable them to achieve the highest possible outcome. In the case of schools, this is helping every child reach their highest potential.</p> <p>For example, an ESL student will struggle more to learn a topic, say chemistry, that is taught in English as opposed to a native English speaker. This is an equity issue that should be addressed. To address this, I want to pilot a digital textbook program that would instantly translate texts to a student’s native language to help them comprehend what is being taught in English.</p> <p>With respect to disciplinary inequities, I have two concerns: treatment of BIPOC students, and students with disabilities. We need to ensure that our students are supported, respected, and not targeted for disciplinary issues to mitigate the school to prison pipeline. Additionally, we have to recognize that students with disabilities may communicate through behavior. And we cannot mistake that behavior for a disciplinary issue.</p>
<p>Ryan McElveen</p>	<p>I endorse the One Fairfax and School Trust policies, although I haven’t been impressed with their implementation. Having served on the School Board that adopted the One Fairfax Policy, I’ve been disappointed that it’s become more of a talking point than a reality. I will work to ensure that the School Trust policy is implemented as its authors and the community envisioned.</p> <p>To begin to confront systemic racism in FCPS, we need to recognize both the history of and linkages between education, affordable housing, healthcare, transportation, and climate change, and use these linkages to fuel the co-location of services in our community and build upon the community schools movement.</p> <p>During my eight years on the School Board, I watched as development decisions were made that frustrated me, leading to the stark divides between the “haves” and “have nots” in Fairfax County. These kinds of development patterns have led to socio-economic “tipping points” in some of our schools and communities, which have in turn increased the strain on public services and community service organizations, which work harder and harder to overcome them.</p> <p>This disparate development has led to subpar facilities, school overcrowding, and disparities in academic achievement measures, discipline, and language access, among other things, in the neediest parts of our county.</p> <p>We must explicitly work to overcome past systemic bias, reduce institutional disparities, and make sure that students in all regions of the county have access to the same quality curriculum and opportunities.</p>

Ilryong Moon	<p>I fully support the One Fairfax and School Trust policies. All Fairfax County Public Schools' stakeholders must be fairly and equitably treated. Addressing the academic achievement disparity means starting in the early years and at home. We need to expand our preschool programs so that all children have opportunities for wholesome preschool experiences. Many of our families are financially, culturally, or linguistically challenged and need assistance providing the best home learning environment for their children. This is an area where we must do better. We should be reaching out to them proactively, determining their needs and developing and sharing solutions with them for how to best prepare (and support) their children for school.</p> <p>Research supports addressing the disparities in academic achievement measures and discipline through actions such as restorative practices, equity-focused policies, culturally responsive teaching as well as (implicit) bias training and awareness, early intervention and support, and through parent and community engagement – fostering strong partnerships with parents and the community to create a supportive and inclusive learning environment.</p> <p>Improving language access in schools for students and families with language barriers is crucial to ensuring an equitable education and effective communication. In addition to many of the services Fairfax County Public schools already offers like translators, translated instructional materials, and a curriculum for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), some policies to further improve language access include more parent and community engagement, additional collaboration with local community organizations, and regularly collecting and analyzing data on our language access initiatives to assess their effectiveness.</p>
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QUESTION 7: LGBTQ+ STUDENTS. *What steps, if any, do you believe should be taken to protect and affirm LGBTQ+ students? Current FCPS Regulation 2603 gives students agency on sharing and expressing their gender identity and sexual orientation and does not authorize schools to share this information without their permission. Do you believe this should remain standard practice in FCPS?*

Maureen Brody	<p>The first thing I need to say is everyone needs to be treated with kindness and respect. That doesn't always mean affirmation—as in agreement—but it does mean respecting the person where they are in life.</p> <p>That said, I'm deeply concerned about the rise in mental health problems and the pressure put on youth to adopt "the newest thing." The fact that there has been an exponential increase in transgenderism in the past ten years is indicative not of a suppressed identity problem but of the influence of a popular movement funded by an industry that profits off of transgender treatments. These are trends pushed on our youth by a money-ravenous, revenue-addicted industry, and I think it is our duty to protect our children from these profiteers.</p> <p>So, no, I don't think the schools should keep secrets from parents about what goes on in the school day. And I don't think it's even lawful to force other students or anyone employed by the schools to participate in the falsehood that someone was assigned the wrong gender at birth. If a child wants to identify as a cat, no one should be obligated to meow to that person or clean up its detritus from a litter box. We don't help the anorexic by giving her laxatives or encouraging her weight loss, and we don't help kids with chromosomes they dislike by calling them by preferred pronouns or amputating their body parts. Of all things school counselors should do, the number-one priority is let the parents know. There is no one who loves the child more or has more authority over their well-being.</p>
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Peter Gabor	<p>My position is the following: FCPS should not be in the business of contravening (disobeying) any federal or state laws. This would be the exact opposite of the values that FCPS should (be trying to) instill in its students. The state has recently, on July 18, '23, issued a policy statement on transgender students, leaning on the 14th amendment and VA Code 1-240.1. FCPS responded on July 19 that "FCPS policies are consistent with federal and state anti-discrimination laws", and that they would be reviewing the state's model policies. In as much as Reg. 2603 is in compliance with the model policy, we are set. If not, it should probably be modified minimally to bring it into compliance.</p>
Kyle McDaniel	<p>I am very focused on protecting our LGBTQ+ community members, and I am proud to be endorsed by Robert Rigby, Co-President of FCPS Pride. I support the model policies crafted under the Northam Administration and oppose the Youngkin Administration's attempts to modify them. I would support the current 2603 regulation, and I would encourage teachers and staff to support members of the LGBTQ+ community. Meaningful action to protect, celebrate, and support members of the community is necessary, not simply talking about it.</p> <p>We also need to recognize that many members of the community, including our students, do not feel comfortable speaking up and advocating for themselves, and that is why we need leadership on the School Board to take on that role; creating a safe and welcoming space where they feel able to speak up. Additionally, it needs to be made clear that anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments, bullying, etc. will not be tolerated and will be identified for what it is: bigotry.</p>
Ryan McElveen	<p>In 2015, I led the successful effort to change the nondiscrimination policy of Fairfax County Public Schools to protect community members from discrimination based on gender identity. The change led our district to become the first in the state to offer this kind of protection. At the time, this undertaking garnered national headlines, in part because it occurred on the leading edge of a national movement attacking the rights of the transgender community and pushing many other jurisdictions to drop their efforts to provide similar protections. Although we faced backlash in Fairfax, we persisted and were successful, in large part because it was the right thing to do.</p> <p>In the years since, the adoption of Regulation 2603 has codified the intent of that nondiscrimination policy change. I support ensuring student agency for sharing and expressing their gender identity and sexual orientation while preventing schools from sharing this information without student permission.</p> <p>It is incumbent on School Board members to ensure that our schools remain places where our students are welcomed, respected, and loved, no matter who they are. Creating this environment requires including LGBTQIA+ issues not only in sex-ed classes but also in the broader curriculum, ensuring that the LGBTQIA+ community is represented on committees and where policy is made, hosting books about the LGBTQIA+ experience in school libraries, and providing social-emotional supports for LGBTQIA+ students and staff. I have always been, and will continue to be, a champion of this community.</p>
Ilyong Moon	<p>I have always supported, and will continue to support, our non-discrimination policy and fully support the provisions set forth in Regulation 2603. Student health and safety is a prominent concern for the students who may not be authorizing schools to share the information. We will always protect our students and respect their decisions. I will continue to support Regulation 2603 as I have not seen any evidence it negatively affects our students or their families.</p>

QUESTION 8: SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES. *FCPS is required to provide a free and appropriate public education to students who are identified as needing an IEP or 504 plan. What are your policy goals related to Special Education services? Families of children with disabilities often express frustration with the services and education provided. How will you ensure that every child in FCPS receives an equitable education regardless of their abilities?*

<p>Maureen Brody</p>	<p>This is an especially hard topic because there are the competing, legitimate interests of both the special needs child and the mainstream child. There are important social interactions children with disabilities need to have with their peers who are not handicapped, so—for those who are able—at least part of the day should be spent in the regular classroom. And for those with only physical disabilities, every accommodation should be made to adapt the classroom for their fullest participation.</p> <p>For students with disruptive behavioral, attention or learning disabilities, it would be better to have them receive their academic lessons in a tailored environment so they can excel in those areas in which they are inclined and receive remedial attention in areas that need particular improvement. Additionally, parents and teachers must be able to work together to formulate a plan that puts the student at the greatest advantage. We absolutely must hire and keep teachers who are trained specialists in educating those with autism, severe ADHD, and physical, mental and emotional challenges. And we must provide environments that are safe for staff and students alike.</p> <p>For children who simply cannot function in the classroom at all, we do have the centers of learning, such as at Key Intermediate. Those are very difficult situations, and we must hire highly trained personnel for the care of those students.</p>
<p>Peter Gabor</p>	<p>US Law (FAPE 2004), Virginia Law (Code of Virginia 81-30A, 20-81-230B, 20-81-80M), FCPS Policy 2670 and Regulation 2670 mandate a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for students with disabilities. This appears to not be a policy question so much as an implementation issue which may bear investigation. FCPS recently (in this past school year) reached an agreement in this area which included, among other things, extra training for personnel regarding services that were apparently not rendered. If the question refers to aspects that were not addressed, these should be looked into. If a student or parent is entitled to something by law or regulation, then FCPS should comply. Possibly, a FAPE advocate would help so we can approach this compassionately.</p>
<p>Kyle McDaniel</p>	<p>This starts with increased communication and consistency. One of the complaints I hear is a lack of consistent program access and implementation across the County. This is a recurring theme, and one that I am very serious about addressing, especially for our Special Education community. While there is some utility in deferring programmatic decision making to the school level, in this case I would say it causes inconsistent access to services that are needed.</p> <p>Additionally, we need to do a better job raising awareness, especially in underserved areas of the County, of the many programs that are available for students with these needs. One of the main barriers to this is the sheer size of our school system, but we can't let logistical difficulties stand in the way of equitable education for kids. I have heard many stories of kids needing these services, but for various reasons the parents were either not aware of their availability or did not have the means to apply for and shepherd their child through the system. This is unacceptable and needs to be corrected.</p>

<p>Ryan McElveen</p>	<p>After years of legal complaints and settlements regarding special education services, FCPS is working toward providing improved services for our neurodiverse students, including the recent hiring of specialists for dyslexia, neurodiversity, and twice exception education. However, the county must do better to support our students with disabilities, twice exceptional students, and profoundly gifted students – programs for whom have strengths but also pervasive weaknesses. The weaknesses stem from the fact that robust curriculum and pedagogical practices have not spread equitably throughout the system and, as a result, have left many students without access to the benefits of those programs. We need to provide all students access to environments – in some cases specialized schools or academies – where they can blossom.</p>
<p>Ilyong Moon</p>	<p>My goal is to ensure special education students receive appropriate services to meet their individual needs and prepare them to meet the challenges in the next phase of their lives once they leave us. We must provide our special education staff with the adequate support they need to educate the students. We must continue our inclusion practices and provide necessary practical skills. Twice-exceptional students’ needs should not be overlooked, and they should be provided with opportunities to realize their full potential. To accomplish this, staffing ratios need to be at an appropriate level; the current staffing ratio overwhelms our teachers in meeting the students’ needs and results in a high turnover of the special education teachers. Both federal and state governments must step up in providing funding for these enhanced levels of resources. The IEP process must be well communicated to and understood by parents. Often, parents feel their opinions are not taken into consideration and they feel overrun by the school system’s experts and their educational jargon. In many cases, better communication is the key, but our special education staff are overloaded with work.</p> <p>I hope that we will implement all of the recommendations made by the American Institutes for Research in its September, 2022 audit report of Fairfax County Public Schools’ special education services. Some of those recommendations include the following:</p> <p>Create a standardized process and guidance for how staff should gather and document parent input during the eligibility determination and IEP development processes; Create a framework for parents and staff to enhance collaboration during the eligibility determination and IEP development processes; Monitor postsecondary transition planning supports to ensure students across all disability categories and their families have equitable access; Ensure equity and consistency in school-level programming, especially the availability and use of evidence-based strategies and programs for SWDs; Ensure quality of instruction in inclusive settings; Develop and implement a comprehensive, division-wide professional development plan with differentiated offerings targeted to the needs of special education teachers, instructional support staff, general education teachers, and administrators; Develop and implement a comprehensive support plan for novice and/or provisionally licensed teachers to include instructional coaching, mentorship, and professional development; Promote equitable access to translation services across FCPS; and, Provide district-wide guidance on procedures for communication between schools and parents.</p>

QUESTION 9: SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS. *Do you support the current structure of the School Resource Officer program or would you recommend changes? For example, SROs are now permitted to arrest students for any violation of state and county codes, including low level offenses. Would you support limiting criminal investigations to serious violent actions that are not suitable for resolution through the disciplinary process?*

<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Maureen Brody</p>	<p>The SRO program at its core is a good idea. In all our time at Fairfax County schools, I never saw a kid be arrested for a “low-level” offense. In fact, I saw many students given great leniency in the hope they would reform after just a stern discussion and maybe a short suspension. I think giving officers and school administrators that leeway is the optimal way to go, as long as they involve the parents.</p> <p>I would not support limiting criminal investigations to serious violent actions, though, because stealing iPhones, selling drugs, sexually harassing people, and threatening are all minor legal infractions (when compared to serious violence) but are indicators that the perpetrator is off the rails. In all of these cases, interaction with law enforcement—if handled appropriately—can help the violator understand the gravity of the problem and can establish a paper trail so incremental improvement or decline can be monitored. We have seen repeatedly in school shootings that the criminal had a long history of “non-serious” actions that should have given ample warning of a potential problem.</p> <p>An SRO doesn’t have to kick everyone’s *ss, but a good SRO will contribute to order in the schools and help identify potential problems.</p>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Peter Gabor</p>	<p>I support the authority of the police. The SRO (School Resource Officer) Memorandum of Understanding from 2018 clearly spells out that school level discipline is to be handled strictly within the school and absent the SRO, and that SROs don't get access to student records (absent dire circumstances). Regarding the SRO, it also says (under the heading: Law Enforcement Officer): "... an arrest of a student is a last resort and ... all reasonable efforts are made to divert the student from entry into the justice system."</p>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Kyle McDaniel</p>	<p>I generally align with the Arlington County model which removed routine policing functions from SROs. Our schools are places of education, community, and inclusion, not places where law enforcement conduct criminal policing activities. Per the Arlington report, which I agree with, I would argue that SROs in Fairfax County are conduction jobs that are not law enforcement related, which is outside their training and role. This is not to say that we should outright eliminate any relationship with FCPD. But, rather, that we should curtail it to emergency response, informational and community building, and handling specific incidents that are outside the capabilities of FCPS administration to handle.</p> <p>I would support limiting arrest authority in schools because I do have a concern about the school-to-prison pipeline which, when coupled with the glaring disparities in discipline, leads to disproportionate arrest of low income and minority students. I would support curtailing arrest and investigative functions to serious, violent actions that would be outlined in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the County.</p>

Ryan McElveen	As previously stated, the primary responsibility of school systems is to keep students safe and secure while at the same time preserving a welcoming environment. SROs play an important role to keep schools safe at the middle and high school levels. Although some FCPS studies have presented the option of expanding SROs to elementary schools, I do not recommend expanding the SRO program beyond its current configuration. I am supportive of limiting criminal investigations to serious violent actions.
Ilyong Moon	I strongly believe the structure of the School Resource Officer (SRO) program can, and must, be improved. Maintaining trust between the students and our SROs is critical to the success of the entire program. If SROs are only seen as police officers enforcing criminal laws, that relationship will be jeopardized. I support limiting criminal investigations to serious infractions not suitable for resolution through the existing disciplinary process.

QUESTION 10: JOINT ENVIRONMENTAL TASK FORCE. *How will you assure that FCPS meets the climate recommendations for facilities and operations in the Joint Environmental Task Force Report, and assure that awareness of the climate crisis is an important part of the curriculum?*

Maureen Brody	<p>First off, there is no climate crisis. The climate changes over millennia, and people deal with it; they don't alter it. Secondly, being good stewards of the world is everyone's responsibility. Thirdly, FCPS has not actually done anything other than meet and propose ideas since the JET was formed.</p> <p>Reducing waste is good. The move to electric buses is stupid. Electricity is generated by coal, oil or nuclear power, which uses a lot of resources in its facilities. Batteries for EVs are highly toxic, very expensive to repair or replace, and unrecyclable. Mining the raw materials for batteries has human rights and child labor problems. The whole thing is another virtue-signaling exercise that is expensive and doesn't achieve stated goals. Dump that idea. The money is better spent on academics. Plus, charging stations would be another huge expense, with tons of carbon output to manufacture and install them.</p> <p>Solar panels have the same problem—they are not recyclable, use toxic materials, are expensive to replace, and can create expensive structural problems, such as leaks, mold and fires. I think the whole JET should be voted out and new people, like me, with better ideas should be voted in.</p> <p>Lastly, we have a serious problem in Fairfax County with rain runoff. Virginia had to amend its land use policies because of depletion of aquifers serving the state. But FCPS has paved all our football fields. What a joke. Acreage that could capture, store, and reuse water or let the water seep into the aquifer have been made into runoff plazas. It says to me there is no real care about the environment.</p>
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Peter Gabor	<p>My view is that the purview of the FCPS School Board is to maintain a strict focus on education (see also K.R. Anderson, FCPS Board Mtg 4/28/22, 1:49:50: "We are in the business of education, and nothing more"). The recommendations of the JET are primarily operational, and I think that many of the goals (such as: replace obsolete diesel buses with electric buses, or ensure there are solar panels on new buildings) are reasonable. However, I think some should be revisited (such as the counselor toolkit and accelerated obsoleting of buses). In short, when we can be more energy efficient in the normal course of our operations, we should be, and this is part of the Superintendent's role. If it lies outside of our purview, however, then I would want to discuss those items with the full FCPS School Board. I do think we should teach younger students about our planet's warming climate in the appropriate place in the classroom.</p>
Kyle McDaniel	<p>I support integrating climate change into appropriate curriculums as recommended by subject matter experts.</p> <p>Addressing the JET goals, (all electric bus fleet by 2035, and carbon neutrality by 2040 to name some examples) we need to integrate them into the strategic plan and tie the Superintendent's performance reviews directly to meeting these goals. This takes stakeholder and expert input to develop appropriate metrics, and follow-through to ensure we are making progress towards them.</p>
Ryan McElveen	<p>It is not only sufficient to have strong School Board support of the JET goals – we need to have supportive system staff leadership. I will push for the School Board to establish regular check-in meetings with the Superintendent focused on progress toward the JET goals as well as develop relationships with – and hold accountable for complying with JET goals – the assistant Superintendent for facilities and transportation, executive director of capital improvements and planning, and the directors of transportation services and facilities management.</p> <p>FCPS has made great progress toward ensuring that awareness of the climate crisis is an important part of the curriculum by funding the Get2Green program. The Global Classroom project brings together FCPS students with students around the world to focus on issues like climate change. To continue ensuring that awareness of the climate crisis is embedded in the curriculum, school activities, and the FCPS experience more broadly, I will support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Preserving green space and working to start a countywide tree planting campaign on school grounds to allow for more carbon capture ○ Co-locating County facilities in or on school property, as has been done in the Opportunity Neighborhoods program, to make services more accessible and require less transportation ○ Continuing to reduce the use of single use plastics, Styrofoam, and other non-biodegradable waste ○ Creating a countywide composting program in school cafeterias ○ Adding solar panels on every school and administrative building ○ Improving energy and water efficiency in schools ○ Expanding school gardens to every school ○ Electrifying and increasing the energy efficiency of county vehicle fleets ○ Building on efforts to both electrify and reduce the nation's largest school bus fleet by offering free Fairfax Connector bus passes for students

Ilyong Moon	<p>I supported the School Board's formation of the Joint Environmental Task Force (JET) in 2019. I also supported the school system's goals to install solar roofing, purchase electric buses, meet the Green Building standards in new constructions and renovations, add capacity for more renewable energy in our buildings, educate our students and staff on the critical issues surrounding sustainability, use more recyclable items, and reduce the waste. However, as I understand, the school system is quite behind meeting the goals set forth in the JET's final report.</p> <p>If elected, I will regularly ask for progress reports and require accountability for FCPS not being on track meeting those goals. I support directing the Superintendent to develop a clear plan of action for implementing the School Board's JET goals and a reporting back calendar to assess our progress and make adjustments where needed and appropriate. Additionally, part of the Superintendent's annual performance evaluation should include assessing progress on implementing the JET goals.</p> <p>Our efforts to meet the JET goals can only be successful with everyone in the school system being aware of the climate crisis we are in. Raising student awareness must be part of the instructional curriculum and include frequent reminders, as often as needed. Teachers and staff should all participate in the System's efforts to meet our goals. Energy waste can, and should, be easily avoided and recycled materials used as much as possible.</p> <p>There is, most certainly, work to do without waiting to hear from staff. Recognizing the importance of environmental justice, all County and school initiatives undertaken as a result of these goals and recommendations were to be implemented through the One Fairfax lens with a prioritization on equity. But we know that there are more trailers used for instructional purposes in less affluent areas which also tend to have larger minority populations. Furthermore, when our students in poorer areas are on longer bus routes, these students are subject to more health risks. Their parents are less likely to be able to provide them with rides and they are less likely to have their own cars to drive. They spend more time on the roads. We should address these disparities more urgently.</p>
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QUESTION 11: ALTERNATIVES TO COLLEGE PREP. *College is not a good path for every student upon graduation from high school. Do you support dedicated funding for technical and vocational skills and athletics, as well as programs for music and the arts? What other suggestions do you have to prepare these students for postgraduate life?*

Maureen Brody	<p>I absolutely support money for tech and vocational education. In fact, all the money wasted on DE&I and climate change boondoggles should be poured into vo-tech. Music and the arts is also important to develop the mind and wire the brain for beauty. Athletics also must receive funding so students can develop physically as well as academically and culturally.</p> <p>I have long proposed having a choice for 11th and 12th grade of going into either a college track or a vocational track that produces a full certification, not just a high school certification, for trades and professions such as paralegal, allied health, and insurance brokerage. The vocational track would include courses on doing profit and loss statements, getting loans and insurance, handling payroll and benefits, and managing property and inventory. Many of our students are very capable of starting their own business and should receive training to do so if they want to.</p>
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Peter Gabor	<p>I think this is a good way to go - learning a trade can be a valuable investment in a student's future. FCPS already has some CTE (Career and Technical Education) classes, and I don't see why we shouldn't broaden this program according to the leanings of our students, provided we have sufficient numbers to justify the courses / classes.</p>
Kyle McDaniel	<p>As a pilot and entrepreneur, this is an area of particular importance to me. Personally, I am still paying off student loans, so I understand the long-term consequences of the push to send kids through college, regardless of whether it's a good fit.</p> <p>I fully support the expansion of STEAM pathways and academies throughout all regions of FCPS. I would be supportive of increasing funding for these programs, and establishing new programs within the arts, music, and, of course, aviation. I would note, that in grade school I benefited from music. I played woodwind, string, and brass. I not only learned how to understand music, but those skills translated to another subject I struggled with, math. Had I not had music in my life, I may not have fully appreciated the practical application of math.</p> <p>As an entrepreneur, I would like to see the creation of elective courses on business and entrepreneurship. I would also like to create an FCPS wide "shark tank" style competition that encourages kids of all ages to come up with innovative ideas, invent products, and solve problems. We have incredible talent in FCPS, and we should foster and encourage it.</p>
Ryan McElveen	<p>I have always been a strong supporter of our athletic, music, theater, and arts programs, and I've maintained that support in difficult budget times.</p> <p>I have supported improved alignment between FCPS, community colleges, four-year college institutions and apprenticeships, and been a champion of Career and Technical Education and community college dual-enrollment programs. I also led Board advocacy to the UVA Board of Visitors to reinstate the AccessUVA program, which aids many economically disadvantaged FCPS graduates (the program was later restored).</p> <p>One of FCPS's best resources is its school-based academies, but too few students have access to these programs because attending these programs often requires long bus rides and double-blocking. I want to make these academy programs accessible to more students by reducing the geographic divides and increasing specialized program offerings throughout the county.</p> <p>Finally, an additional effort I spearheaded was the creation of the FCPS Alumni Networking Action Group, which developed a plan to better engage FCPS alumni and establish an alumni association, with the goal of improving fundraising, mentorship and networking opportunities in the Fairfax County community. This work included efforts to improve the collection of information from graduating students so that they can remain connected with the community after graduating and the system can better track their college and career paths. I hope to continue this work and move toward the establishment of an FCPS Alumni Association.</p>
Illyong Moon	<p>The percentage of students not going to college immediately after graduation has increased for a variety of reasons. To prepare students for alternative pathways after graduation, I support continued, dedicated funding for our Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs and the Fairfax County Public Schools' Academies that provide those career experiences and training for students who may want to pursue a path other than a 4-year college or university. Our CTE programs should be expanded so that ALL students have the opportunity to acquire practical job skills. So, the answer is an emphatic YES – I support dedicated funding for technical and vocational skills and athletics, as well as programs for music and arts.</p> <p><i>Continued next page</i></p>

I also support increasing opportunities for students to explore internships and experience, firsthand, the different kinds of skills needed in the job market. Internships also provide our students with the ability to use, in the “real world,” what they learn in our programs. All of these opportunities should be equitably available to all students throughout the County. Currently, not all students enjoy the same opportunities. Disparities of the opportunities exist based upon the schools they attend and the families the students come from.

QUESTION 12: CHARTER SCHOOLS. *Under what circumstances, if any, would you be inclined as a member of the School Board to support a public charter school application presented to the Board? What legislative changes, if any, would you recommend that the General Assembly enact regarding charter schools, laboratory schools or other uses of public funds for private education?*

Maureen Brody

Virginia already allows charter schools, free of tuition and operating outside of the policies of the local school division (see Code of Virginia § 22.1-212.6, and I do support the idea. The management of a charter school is a complex process, though, so anyone wishing to form one must learn much and come completely prepared with a business plan and the ability to hire staff and administrators. The application information (in case anyone reading this would be interested in developing a charter school) is here: <https://www.doe.virginia.gov/teaching-learning-assessment/specialized-instruction/charter-schools>.

Virginia also already has lab schools underway, and NOVA and George Mason are already on the list of schools working to participate. This is great news. There is also state funding dedicated to this and a serious plan of action to expand the project. This is a classic public/private partnership with several Fortune 100 businesses participating as well. Lab schools are an excellent way to assist those interested in specialty areas, such as coding, aeronautics, physics, medicine and other specialty areas, get the extraordinary training needed to excel after high school.

As for using public funding for non-government school education, I do support that since the goal of public funding for education is not having the government dictate what is learned but in getting well educated students. There are obviously baseline requirements from the Virginia Department of Education on academic rigor that must be met, but once those are met, the stated goal of publicly supported education is well supported by non-government schools.

Peter Gab

While I would hear out any proposal per Policy 1400 & Regulation 1400, I think FCPS is a primarily quality school district, and I'm disinclined to invite in another player.

Kyle McDaniel	<p>I do not support use of public funds for private education at all. I oppose vouchers, charters, etc. I am not running for the General Assembly, but I would encourage lawmakers to ensure that tax dollars are not funneled to private companies in education, and that charter schools/lab schools are governed locally by duly elected School Boards, not state or private appointed Boards.</p>
Ryan McElveen	<p>I am not inclined to support public charter applications; however, I would not prejudge applications, especially those submitted by Fairfax County educators. Ultimately, the likelihood of public charter applications coming to the School Board is very low, as applications first must be approved by the State Board of Education.</p> <p>For example, in 2012-13, the School Board was presented with the opportunity to support the Fairfax Leadership Academy, a charter school envisioned by JEB Stuart High School educator Eric Welch to help support high school students at risk of dropping out. It was an interesting proposal in that it would have been able circumvent state requirements on traditional public schools (like preventing year-round schooling).</p> <p>Ultimately, the problem with that charter proposal, like other charters, is that it would have funneled resources from traditional schools that could otherwise have supported the same students with fewer start-up costs. What this experience taught us is that we need to listen to our educators and provide them with opportunities experiment with unique ideas within the public school system and advocate for changes to state law where needed.</p> <p>I do not think that any legislative changes are needed regarding using public funds for charter schools or private schools. It is rightly difficult to establish new charter schools in Virginia. However, I do think traditional school districts should be allowed more flexibility – and local control – in terms of running their schools, and that is something that the School Board must fight for every session as part of the FCPS legislative program.</p>
Ilryong Moon	<p>I am not in favor of programs that take resources away from our public schools. Under current law, School Board members are obligated to review all applications that come to the Board and I will continue to do so. I recommend legislative changes to give local school districts latitude to initiate and try creative programs that might not meet all the state and regulatory requirements. For example, if more local flexibility on graduation requirements were allowed, we could create a program that would grant credits for on-site work/internship experiences toward graduation requirements. We might even be able to allow students to graduate early and provide more students with opportunities for gap years to try something before entering college.</p>

QUESTION 13: RESTORING CIVILITY. *School Board meetings have become disruptive and lacking in civility. How will you bring civility back?*

Maureen Brody	<p>I am not worried at all about civility at School Board meetings. If a parent is mad, let him speak his mind. My job as member at large is not to be a manners policeman; it is to fully hear and respect the ideas, sentiments and complaints of parents, students and taxpayers. If I'm doing my something that causes someone to cuss me out, then I should be willing to hear that. What is uncivil, literally, is to turn off the microphone and lights when a parent is presenting and run out of the room—something the sitting Board has done.</p> <p><i>Continued next page</i></p>
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2023 NONPARTISAN FAIRFAX COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD VOTER GUIDE
September 4, 2023

	<p>I make it my life’s work to interact with people civilly, albeit forcefully, so I’m not worried one iota about someone’s manners. I prefer honesty to decorum.</p> <p>And by the way, I have been at numerous FCPS meetings and have found the only disruptive behavior comes from parents who feel they are being ignored by the establishment. What alternative do they have when the board meets in working sessions and decides on matters then comes for a dog and pony show before the public only to hear 95% opposition to their ideas, say thanks for your input, then vote that night for the thing the 95% opposed? Of course arrogance like that is going to cause blowback. Well deserved I will add!</p>
Peter Gabor	<p>The uncivil person is one with whom conversation is stilted to impossible. Civility is vital to any kind of conversation or process. Board members should be civil and have decorum, even in the face of uncivility. As regards School Board meetings, there is no conversation with the commenting public. They have 2 minutes for making a statement to the School Board, and are cut off if they exceed that time.</p>
Kyle McDaniel	<p>This is a tough issue to address because we must respect the First Amendment. On the one hand we can’t violate the free speech rights of the public, however I do recognize that we also cannot permit monopolization or disruption of the discussion. This involves close coordination with various staff to promulgate rules and policies. I think a civil tone starts at the top, in this case the School Board.</p> <p>Calm, levelheaded, steady leadership goes a long way. I do not see right-wing agitators slowing down, in fact if anything they may become emboldened. As I have said since day one of my campaign, we need members of the School Board to stand together as a united team to protect our schools, kids, and teachers, from these bad actors. That is what I intend to do.</p>
Ryan McElveen	<p>As a School Board member, I had a front row seat to incivility. I am used to having my head on a stake, being called epithets, and undergoing safety training in preparation for being attacked at the School Board dais. When I brought forward the proposal to extend our nondiscrimination protections to gender identity in 2015, I personally faced the brunt of hostility and hatred.</p> <p>It is important to remember that School Boards are the elected bodies that are closest to the people, and that all citizens deserve to be heard, no matter how much we may disagree with their opinions. Things go too far when safety is threatened.</p> <p>In recent years, discord has also been rising over the inability of political leaders to substantively address white supremacy, gun violence, and climate change. Young people have turned to social media to amplify their voices and mobilize their followers to act. The aftermath of the Parkland school shooting witnessed students around the country organizing protests and moments of silence. Some school districts supported the first amendment rights of students; other districts punished them. I recognized the need to systemically change how American school systems support students across the political spectrum who are eager to be civically engaged. I proposed and we passed a policy — a first of its kind in the United States — allowing students to receive an excused absence to participate in civic engagement activities. The following year, the Virginia General Assembly enacted a state law modeled after that policy, so now all Virginia students have that same right. This initiative helps teach students how to funnel their advocacy in productive ways, thus helping turn the tide of incivility.</p>
Ilryong Moon	<p>It is important to establish meeting guidelines, set compliance expectations, and enforce civility. We also need to provide adequate venues for the public to participate in a discourse on student needs. We will, however, always have naysayers and rule breakers no matter how hard we try. We can only do our best; if we have fair rules and enforce them with consistency and in good faith, the community will understand.</p>

BRADDOCK DISTRICT

Responding Candidate: Rachna Sizemore Heizer

Did Not Respond: Priscilla DeStefano

QUESTION 1: MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS: *There are several factors that have adversely impacted the mental health of students, teachers and staff in public schools, including bullying, active shooter drills, culture wars and the pandemic. What initiatives will you champion to address mental health needs in the Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) system?*

Rachna Sizemore Heizer

Addressing mental health needs has been a strong focus of the current School Board. We recognized that, according to the CDC, student anxiety and depression have been on the rise for ten years. And I've long said that the pandemic is a global trauma from which we have global PTSD. I think that is part of what has caused the divisiveness and anger. During my tenure on the Board, we have expanded mental health services, including starting a tele-mental health service for high school students, expanding access to counselors, increasing counselors and psychologists, and embedding mental wellness into the school day. I was proud to champion creating a Trauma Informed Specialist position and starting the work of creating a trauma-informed policy. Going forward, we should complete the trauma-informed policy to guide our work going forward. We need to look into expanding tele-mental health services to all students and staff, protecting and expanding counseling, and continuing to build strong relationships with state, local, and non-profit partners to help provide support and mentoring for mental health needs. For staff, we need to continue to look at ways to reduce workload and provide mentoring and mental health support. And we need to continue to partner with students and staff to hear from them what would help the most. We need to expand peer-to-peer support programs, mental health first aid programs, and programs aimed at building resilience. Studies also show providing access to outdoor education and creating authentic ways for students to connect and belong promote mental wellness.

As for bullying, I will continue to champion efforts to not only promote civility but to intentionally teach acceptance, respect, and understanding for all. We must teach about the specific harm that comes from bullying, that bullying based on identity such as LGBTQIA+, neurodiversity, or other identities is a form of bigotry, and will not be tolerated. We must teach about how to be inclusive and respectful and why. I have long been a champion of
Continued next page

inclusion but that can only be successful if we create welcoming environments where students can be their authentic selves. This must include explicitly naming the harm bullying causes, the bigotry behind bullying based on identity, and that we do not tolerate name calling or bigotry against LGBTQIA+, neurodivergent, racial or ethnic minorities, gender, religious, and other marginalized groups. We must continue to include inclusive lessons and books where our diverse populations are represented to build understanding and inclusion. Research shows that one of the most effective ways to address bullying is to turn bystanders into champions. In other words, teach students who witness bullying but don't say anything, into champions who speak up against it or tell a trusted adult so the situation can be addressed immediately.

We must continue to ensure our school environments are respectful and welcoming to reduce the potential for bullying. While this requires a multifaceted approach of reteaching, naming the bigotry and harm, building bridges of understandability, accountability, justice, and creating a respectful atmosphere, I am proud to have championed the hiring of a Neurodiversity Specialist and a Twice Exceptional Coordinator whose jobs include creating an atmosphere of understanding and respect and inclusion of the lived norms of neurodivergent students as part of the lived norms of humanity. Statistics show neurodivergent students currently experience some of the highest rates of bullying. The higher prevalence of neurodivergent students who are also LGBTQIA+ means this work will impact multiple marginalized communities. We must continue to be trauma-informed in our work to keep our schools safe and inclusive.

When I fight for inclusion, I am not only fighting for children with disabilities. I fight for ALL of us, educated together, accepted and welcomed. Inclusion leads to understanding. Understanding leads to acceptance. One way to have a more accepting society, to address the rise in bullying, hate, and divisiveness, is through inclusion, through everyone learning and working together. That has to start in our schools.

QUESTION 2: SCHOOL SAFETY. *The prospect of an active shooter is a serious safety concern. What steps do you recommend to ensure safety for everyone in our schools?*

Rachna Sizemore Heizer	<p>This Board has been focused on doing what we can to prevent gun violence. Much of the work needs to be done at the state and federal level to ensure common sense gun safety regulations. On this Board, we need to ensure our educators and staff recognize the potential signs of violence, and continue our robust threat assessments immediately upon notice of a potential threat. We must continue to enhance and implement best practices research based mental health supports, crisis intervention programs, and violence prevention programs. This Board initiated a safety and security audit and it will be important to work with the Superintendent to implement the recommendations of the audit. We have done many things within our limited power to address gun violence prevention, including requiring the Superintendent to notify parents yearly that they have a legal obligation to securely store guns, changing our legislative programs to advocate at the state and federal levels for better gun violence prevention laws, fully funded security vestibule construction, and expanding gun prohibitions to all school property. We must continue to address discipline disparities for marginalized communities, including students of color or disabled students. Safety must mean safety for all.</p>
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QUESTION 3: TEACHER SHORTAGE. *We have a growing teacher shortage. How will you address this issue?*

Rachna Sizemore Heizer	<p>As Chair of the School Board, I was proud to have led the Board to a unanimous vote on the collective bargaining resolution that will give teachers a stronger voice in the decision-making spaces as well as support the initial vote that kicked off the process that led to the resolution. Now that the collective bargaining resolution is in place, it can be a gamechanger for recruiting and retaining staff. I am proud we have increased compensation and provided bonuses for two years (and a third coming), but we need help from state and federal partners to incentivize people to go into teacher training programs, including career switchers, through loan forgiveness incentives, subsidized housing, and funding for higher salaries.</p> <p>We can expand FCPS' Teach for Tomorrow program, a student teaching class for current FCPS students, with some being guaranteed a contract upon completion of teacher training programs. A particular focus should be on expanding these programs in schools that have a more diverse population. We have dedicated human resources focused on attracting and retaining excellent diverse candidates, and can continue to review our leadership development programs, principal pool processes, and recruitment efforts.</p> <p>We must also focus on retention strategies as close to 50% of first-time teachers leave the profession within five years. We can strengthen our teacher mentorship program, provide robust resources for teachers and a central space for sharing of resources and protect teacher planning time and teacher directed workdays. We have created affinity groups for teachers and staff and expanded outreach to underrepresented teachers and staff to better understand the challenges.</p>
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QUESTION 4: FACTUAL AND REPRESENTATIVE TEACHING. *Will you explicitly commit FCPS to teach history that is factually accurate, inclusive and age appropriate? How will you work to ensure that literature taught and available in libraries is representative and respects our diverse community of students, staff and families?*

Rachna Sizemore Heizer	<p>In my time on the School Board, I have championed efforts to pass an inclusive calendar, supported our expert librarians and their inclusive collections, fought efforts to ban books, and supported development of culturally responsive and inclusive curriculum and practices. As chair, I have led the work with my colleagues to stand up to the Governor against his dangerous policies targeting teaching of accurate and complete history, his efforts to silence teachers, and against his attempts to revise standards to teach inaccurate history. I was proud to testify on behalf of the School Board to the Governor and his Virginia Department of Education that the proposed changes deemphasized critical thinking and analysis skills, were historically inaccurate and lacked inclusion of multiple perspectives. I am a firm believer that we need to teach all our history in order to prevent repeating the mistakes of our past and move towards a better, more inclusive future. I also believe our democracy needs citizens capable of critical thinking and understanding all of history. I will continue championing efforts to ensure our curriculum, especially our social studies curriculum, is inclusive, developmentally appropriate, accurate, and reflective of our full history and the narratives of our diverse multicultural community.</p>
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QUESTION 5: BOOK BANNING AND PARENTAL RIGHTS. *The issue of banning books and calls for expanded parental rights have become hot topics in school districts. How would you handle these issues? How does FCPS encourage parents' involvement in their children's education and what, if anything, needs to change?*

Rachna Sizemore Heizer	<p>Despite the national agenda and concerted efforts to ban books, which has resulted in hundreds of books being banned across the country, I am proud that our Board has not voted to ban a single book. We have stood strong with our expert librarians and educators who have used their training and education to curate inclusive, diverse, accurate, and developmentally appropriate reading materials. We should continue to handle the availability of reading materials as we currently do, by allowing our experts in education to do their job.</p> <p>FCPS has a long history of partnering with parents/caregivers through robust PTAs, parent engagement in principal councils, workgroups, community groups, forums, town halls, hiring panels, participation in advisory committees, surveys, and more. We have also expanded the availability of information online for parents and caregivers to see curriculum guides and more. We absolutely value family engagement, as studies show family engagement leads to better outcomes for students. We have expanded our family liaisons and continue to provide free webinars and resources through the Parent Resources Center, have included many parents and community members throughout our strategic planning process through participation in planning teams, surveys, focus groups, and community forums. This voice is critical in the strategic planning work that will set the vision for our schools. We have a clear process for considering objections to reading material and we also have opt-out procedures for families so they can partner regarding their own student without impacting the rights of other families and students.</p>
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QUESTION 6: ADDRESSING DISPARITY. *Do you endorse the One Fairfax and School Trust policies? How will you lead the School Board in confronting racial and social inequities in all FCPS policies and practices? How will you address the disparity in academic achievement measures and discipline, and improve language access?*

Rachna Sizemore Heizer

I endorse the One Fairfax and School Trust Policies.

FCPS must remain a welcoming and inclusive school system, with equitable opportunities and access for all students. Together, we can protect and strengthen public education, the bedrock of our community, economy, and democracy. This work must include closing gaps in achievement and discipline, confronting racial and social inequities, and improving language access. I was proud to support the School Trust Policy and the goals of One Fairfax, which mandates opportunity and access for all students to the excellent education for which Fairfax County is known.

To continue to work on our One Fairfax commitment, we need to do the following:

- **Equitable program placement** to expand access to advanced academics, career and technical education, arts, athletics, and other enrichment programs. No matter where you live, you receive FCPS' world class education.
- **Needs-based resources, intensive support, and inclusive education** for those with achievement and opportunity gaps. We must create an inclusive environment where students are welcomed, connected, belong and provided with the support and resources to meet their needs and thrive. This includes increased investments in translation and interpretation, multilingual family liaisons and multilingual family support.
- through the Parent Resource Center for multilingual families of students with disabilities to better understand and participate in the special education processes, intensive intervention for students with limited or interrupted education (SLIFE) students. We need to continue to provide needs-based resources to Title I schools and those on the "bubble" of being Title I schools. We need to continue to fund family liaisons at these schools to build strong family partnerships, provide interventions and programs aimed at college success, and ensure equitable access to enrichment and programs.

It is important to remember that the School Board is a policy and governance board. We set policy while the Superintendent is responsible for day-to-day operations. Our job is to set clear metrics of success and measurements of that success, as well as adequate funding, and oversee the Superintendent's effectiveness in meeting these needs and closing gaps through her annual evaluation.

QUESTION 7: LGBTQ+ STUDENTS. *What steps, if any, do you believe should be taken to protect and affirm LGBTQ+ students? Current FCPS Regulation 2603 gives students agency on sharing and expressing their gender identity and sexual orientation and does not authorize schools to share this information without their permission. Do you believe this should remain standard practice in FCPS?*

Rachna Sizemore Heizer	<p>I supported and continue to support R2603 and the amendments to our Student Rights and Responsibilities identifying the rights of transgender and gender-expansive students. I worked with my colleagues to develop a statement standing up to Governor Youngkin’s attempts to undermine protections for LGBTQIA+ students, staff and families and will continue to stand up to these efforts.</p> <p>I have been a steady voice of support in our work around these and additional changes to our regulations and proposals that support LGBTQIA+ people and affirm their dignity and against efforts in Richmond to strip away rights and protections from LGBTQIA+ people.</p> <p>I commit to upholding our stringent policies protecting LGBTQIA+ students, stronger than anywhere in the state, ensure a safe and welcoming atmosphere, and stand up to efforts to strip away rights from our LGBTQIA+ students, staff, and families and to continue to fight efforts to weaken these protections.</p>
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QUESTION 8: SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES. *FCPS is required to provide a free and appropriate public education to students who are identified as needing an IEP or 504 plan. What are your policy goals related to Special Education services? Families of children with disabilities often express frustration with the services and education provided. How will you ensure that every child in FCPS receives an equitable education regardless of their abilities?*

Rachna Sizemore Heizer

It is imperative to provide a free and appropriate public education as required by IDEA. I have spent many years fighting for the rights of students who need a 504 or an IEP. As the mother of two twice exceptional students, one with a 504 and another with an IEP, for whom his exceptionality isn't yet fully recognized within the twice exceptional language, I am no stranger to the needs and issues. I learned from my son, my brilliant musician with autism for whom I had to fight to be included in music classes, that we need to look at our students for their strengths first, providing support for their needs without letting their challenges limit their potential.

I was proud to advocate for the hiring of our Twice Exceptional Coordinator to build and improve services, understanding, and programs for twice exceptional students. We need to continue to improve programming to meet the academic, social, emotional, and executive functioning needs of twice exceptional students. It should not be an either-or choice. I was proud to champion and work closely with our Neurodiversity Specialist to shift our culture to one where students with disabilities are seen as part of the diversity of human existence, shifting the mindset around the education of students with disabilities. We must create a policy and atmosphere of neurodiversity and strengths focused education, where we meet student needs but do not let their deficits limit their potential. Otherwise, we will continue to see the gaps in achievement, discipline, and outcomes. I will continue to work with our neurodiversity specialists, families, staff, and stakeholders to implement the 19 recommendations from the comprehensive School Board initiated external review of special education programming and I look forward to reimagining special education in alignment with our new strategic plan and with a strengths-focus to ensure postsecondary success. We also need to ensure robust family and caregiver partnership in the process, improved transition services and support at key transition points, and in postgraduate and postsecondary transition programs, and measure success by postsecondary outcomes. And we must ensure meaningful inclusion for students, while still providing a continuum of services to provide that individualized education based on evidenced based best practices.

QUESTION 9: SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS. *Do you support the current structure of the School Resource Officer program or would you recommend changes? For example, SROs are now permitted to arrest students for any violation of state and county codes, including low level offenses. Would you support limiting criminal investigations to serious violent actions that are not suitable for resolution through the disciplinary process?*

Rachna Sizemore Heizer	I was on the 2018 commission that revised the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Fairfax County Police Department and was a strong voice to include disability awareness training. I also advocated for clarity of roles and responsibility and better data collection. We need to evaluate the efficacy of the MOU to see if the desired results have been achieved and that all SROs and administrators are undergoing the appropriate training and have the requisite knowledge in how they approach their work. It is important to ensure SROs are enhancing security within a defined role that is well understood. I used to be on the Board of the Falls Church Fairfax Community Services Board, which oversees the Diversion First program. I would be interested in a co-responder model and other efforts to provide appropriate support and disrupt the school to prison pipeline. We must address serious and violent offenses and keep our schools safe but also ensure we address behavior issues in school as much as possible.
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QUESTION 10: JOINT ENVIRONMENTAL TASK FORCE. *How will you assure that FCPS meets the climate recommendations for facilities and operations in the Joint Environmental Task Force Report, and assure that awareness of the climate crisis is an important part of the curriculum?*

Rachna Sizemore Heizer	I was proud to support the School Board's vote to adopt the JET directives. I have asked Dr. Reid for the operational plan to carry out these directives as well as annual updates on results. We must also advocate for funding to support implementation of the JET directives. We are fortunate to have robust environmental stewardship in our curriculum but we need earlier focus on climate change. A review of our science curriculum would be appropriate to ensure environmental stewardship, climate change and other evidenced based best practices is reflected in our curriculum at all grade levels as developmentally appropriate, which includes how to critically analyze the misinformation around climate change in some outside media.
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QUESTION 11: ALTERNATIVES TO COLLEGE PREP. *College is not a good path for every student upon graduation from high school. Do you support dedicated funding for technical and vocational skills and athletics, as well as programs for music and the arts? What other suggestions do you have to prepare these students for postgraduate life?*

Rachna Sizemore Heizer	<p>We have robust career and technical education programs in FCPS but we need to focus on equitable access to these programs, both within the schools and our academy programs. We need to ensure access to these programs – both removing transportation and scheduling barriers and ensuring proper support for access to academy programs and ensuring consistency of career and technical education programming in each school. We need to partner with trade unions and other vocational organizations to create additional apprenticeship opportunities for students. As a parent of two art students – one of whom is pursuing a music career, but both of whom found their passion and place to belong in the arts, I know how important the arts are for our students. Studies show robust arts participation leads to better cognitive and social outcomes, as well as building strong “soft skills” of teamwork, collaboration, communication and more. I know vital STEAM education (science, technology, engineering, arts and math) is necessary for all our students to have the skills for success and leadership in the 21st century workplace. I also know that a foundation in the arts and humanities results in ethical and thoughtful technology practitioners and leaders.</p> <p>Finally, we need to ensure we provide exposure to career and technical education to our students and families in elementary school and middle school and educate them about the possibility of multiple paths to success that include college and career.</p> <p>I serve on the School Board to ensure our schools value and foster all our children’s passions, whether it be academic, artistic, technical, vocational, or athletic, in an inclusive and accepting school environment. We need to help our children discover and flourish at their strengths and passions, while providing the academic, mental resilience, and executive functioning “learn to learn skills” foundation to be successful on their chosen path.</p>
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QUESTION 12: CHARTER SCHOOLS. *Under what circumstances, if any, would you be inclined as a member of the School Board to support a public charter school application presented to the Board? What legislative changes, if any, would you recommend that the General Assembly enact regarding charter schools, laboratory schools or other uses of public funds for private education?*

Rachna Sizemore Heizer	<p>We have excellent public education in Fairfax County that provides all students the chance to succeed on their chosen path, but we need funding to support our programs and improve to ensure equitable access and opportunity for all. Virginia is still behind the nation in teacher salaries and public education funding. Instead of sending tax dollars to charter schools, laboratory schools, or similar “choice” initiatives, the Governor and Virginia General Assembly should fix the long-standing imbalance in the local composite index, which is the school funding formulas that disadvantage Fairfax County Public Schools, and force our local taxpayers to pay a significant portion of the cost of public education. We cannot take limited tax dollars away from public schools, the only institution committed to educating everyone, no matter who they are, their needs and strengths, or where they come from.</p>
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QUESTION 13: RESTORING CIVILITY. *School Board meetings have become disruptive and lacking in civility. How will you bring civility back?*

Rachna Sizemore Heizer	<p>Lack of civility at School Board meetings has mirrored, to some extent, the lack of civility we see on some online forums, but now from behind a microphone in person. While legal guidance limits what we are able to do regarding limiting public comment, we can continue to study best practices and what other regulations districts have implemented around meeting rules and public comment to foster civility and transparency. As the chair of the Public Engagement Committee in 2020-2021, we instituted some changes to our public comment practices to ensure the same few folks wouldn’t speak each week to allow for more of the public to be able to speak, as well as instituted a few other changes allowable by law to encourage a broader swath of comment. School Board members can also lead by example, with clear guidelines for meeting behavior. And we as a society need to speak up to condemn the behavior, without giving it airtime.</p>
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DRANESVILLE DISTRICT

Responding Candidate: Robyn Lady

Did Not Respond: Paul Bartkowski

QUESTION 1: MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS: *There are several factors that have adversely impacted the mental health of students, teachers and staff in public schools, including bullying, active shooter drills, culture wars and the pandemic. What initiatives will you champion to address mental health needs in the Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) system?*

Robyn Lady	<p>As a former counselor (Marshall, TJ, & McLean) and Director of Student Services (DSS) (Chantilly), I have witnessed firsthand how the stressors indicated above have adversely impacted students, teachers, and staff. I also know that when a strong positive culture exists, and when schools promote a responsive, caring, and inclusive community where all feel valued, and supported, these stressors reverse course.</p> <p>As a former coach and class sponsor, I know that when students are actively engaged in co-curricular, athletic, and after school programs, they feel more connected, included, seen, and honored. They also have additional adult mentors in their life who they can trust and turn to in times of need. Additionally, when faculty coach, sponsor, and support extracurricular activities, they build positive relationships with students, which benefits them as well. We need to help students connect to activities before, during, and after school.</p> <p>Recently FCPS started offering all high school students free virtual mental health services through Hazel Health. I would advocate for expanding this to faculty, staff, and middle school students. While this opportunity is fantastic, we also need to lower the student to counselor ratios and add additional school psychologists and social workers in all schools.</p> <p>Finally, when/if students are the target of bullying and harassment, we must name it and make it clear that such bigotry will not be tolerated. When responding to cases, administrators must help bullies understand that there is nothing wrong with people from other races, cultures, religions, orientations, etc.</p>
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QUESTION 2: SCHOOL SAFETY. *The prospect of an active shooter is a serious safety concern. What steps do you recommend to ensure safety for everyone in our schools?*

Robyn Lady	<p>Most importantly, I would focus on preventing such an event from happening. During my 27 years working in FCPS, I do not recall ever being trained on the pre-attack behavior of an active shooter. As a School Board member, I would recommend hiring an expert to design a presentation that outlines the specific behaviors that may precede an attack and that might be useful in identifying, assessing, and managing those who may be on a pathway to violence.</p> <p>While the DSS at Chantilly, our administrative team participated in an active shooter drill with the office of Safety and Security every year. This training was an excellent opportunity for us to work</p> <p><i>Continued next page</i></p>
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	<p>as a team and discuss in detail the best plan of action. While I am not an expert in this subject, I wonder if this depth of training would be helpful for the entire faculty.</p> <p>As a counselor and DSS I was part of several Student Threat Assessments. These teams are pulled together when administrators are notified of a student threat against another person. There are strict protocols regarding how to conduct them. Since some student behaviors start at the previous level (elementary to middle, and/or middle to high school), I would recommend pyramid training to ensure consistency in completing these assessments and how to document them.</p> <p>Finally, I will continue to advocate and support gun safety laws at all levels. I also support fully funding security vestibule construction at the main entrance of every school.</p>
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QUESTION 3: TEACHER SHORTAGE. *We have a growing teacher shortage. How will you address this issue?*

Robyn Lady	<p>We must invest time, energy, and resources to recruit and hire an exceptional and diverse workforce. This requires administrators and Central Office staff to travel to job fairs at colleges and universities both in and out of state. I also believe we must recruit from our Historically Black Colleges and Universities and our Hispanic Serving Institutions. We cannot open any of our schools with long-term substitute teachers. Fairfax County must pay our employees better while also continuing to provide them with outstanding benefits. Collective Bargaining will help achieve this goal.</p> <p>Once hired, we need to ensure that our onboarding process is culturally responsive and a pleasant experience. Fairfax County is huge and too often new employees feel like a number and struggle to get answers to their questions. We should survey new employees three to six months into the job for feedback on their transition and recommendations that would make their onboarding experience better.</p> <p>We must continue to support and grow our Teachers for Tomorrow program and have them sign contingency contracts that guarantee they will be hired by FCPS upon successful completion of a teacher education program. I am also very interested in working with state delegates to push for a bill that would pay for the tuition for Virginia residents who attend Virginia schools, complete teacher certification programs, and teach for five years in a public school in Virginia.</p>
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QUESTION 4: FACTUAL AND REPRESENTATIVE TEACHING. *Will you explicitly commit FCPS to teach history that is factually accurate, inclusive and age appropriate? How will you work to ensure that literature taught and available in libraries is representative and respects our diverse community of students, staff and families?*

Robyn Lady	<p>Absolutely! History is an essential part of our curriculum, and we must ensure that students have an equal understanding of the U.S. and VA's factual history. When FCPS approved African American History at the high school level, I worked with counselors and other faculty members to ensure we had enough students to teach the class. When the College Board initially shared their plans for Advanced Placement African American History, I was excited and felt certain we would have more students enroll because of the AP designation. I was beyond disappointed when the College Board edited the curriculum and deleted several important topics. History and all social science classes must prioritize critical thinking, diverse perspectives, developmental appropriateness, and historical accuracy.</p> <p><i>Continued next page</i></p>
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	<p>I will always advocate for and support culturally responsive classrooms and libraries. Age-appropriate diverse books can serve both as mirrors and windows of different human emotions and experiences. They offer a powerful opportunity to build community, provide validation and affirmation, tell students their stories matter, and show students possibilities of who and what they can be. They also help reduce stigmatization and foster social integration and cultural inclusiveness.</p>
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QUESTION 5: BOOK BANNING AND PARENTAL RIGHTS. *The issue of banning books and calls for expanded parental rights have become hot topics in school districts. How would you handle these issues? How does FCPS encourage parents' involvement in their children's education and what, if anything, needs to change?*

Robyn Lady	<p>First and foremost, I always encouraged the involvement of parents and guardians in their children's education – I know the school system shares that goal. It has been my experience that when this occurs, students achieve greater success in school. While schools throughout our country are banning books, I am extremely proud of our School Board for not banning any. FCPS has and should continue to trust educators and librarians to select age appropriate, diverse, and inclusive literature for students. If someone objects to reading material, FCPS has a clear process for considering those complaints.</p>
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QUESTION 6: ADDRESSING DISPARITY. *Do you endorse the One Fairfax and School Trust policies? How will you lead the School Board in confronting racial and social inequities in all FCPS policies and practices? How will you address the disparity in academic achievement measures and discipline, and improve language access?*

Robyn Lady	<p>Yes, I support the One Fairfax and School Trust policies. I will work with my colleagues on the School Board and the Superintendent to create and fully fund equity initiatives, which includes Pre-K for those who cannot afford private preschool. We must invest in early childhood education and provide the necessary staffing and resources to ensure that all students are reading by third grade. We must also support staffing ratios that account for the different proficiency levels of English Language Learners. When literacy and numeracy skills are learned by third grade, all students will be better prepared to tackle advanced academics.</p> <p>We must work with and support immigrant families and educate them on the Trust Policy. To do this we must increase funding for more multilingual liaisons, and translation services and help parents and guardians enroll in ELL classes. Additionally, we must increase efforts to ease transitions and close gaps for students with limited or interrupted formal education.</p> <p>We must have high expectations for all learners. Counselors and teachers need to encourage all students, especially those with IEP's or 504's, and those from under-represented backgrounds, to take advanced coursework. When students take these courses, we must provide them with resources to help them succeed. And we must better understand the college landscape for our DACA students, help them find schools that will help them, and funding to support their enrollment.</p>
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QUESTION 7: LGBTQ+ STUDENTS. *What steps, if any, do you believe should be taken to protect and affirm LGBTQ+ students? Current FCPS Regulation 2603 gives students agency on sharing and expressing their gender identity and sexual orientation and does not authorize schools to share this information without their permission. Do you believe this should remain standard practice in FCPS?*

Robyn Lady	<p>If elected I will fight to protect and strengthen R2603. As a lesbian and former employee who spent years afraid to be out for fear of losing my job, this hits very close to home.</p> <p>R2603 was life changing for our LGBTQ+ students. I am extremely grateful to the current School Board, and especially Karl Frisch for taking the lead on this work. As the Director of Student Services at Chantilly High School when this regulation passed, I saw firsthand the impact it had on our most marginalized students. As a member of the community, I also felt more empowered to be my authentic self and safer than I had felt prior to that regulation passing.</p> <p>When Governor Youngkin attempted to undue this amazing and much needed work, I was extremely proud of the School Board for standing their ground and continuing to enforce R2603.</p>
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QUESTION 8: SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES. *FCPS is required to provide a free and appropriate public education to students who are identified as needing an IEP or 504 plan. What are your policy goals related to Special Education services? Families of children with disabilities often express frustration with the services and education provided. How will you ensure that every child in FCPS receives an equitable education regardless of their abilities?*

Robyn Lady	<p>Fairfax County Public Schools has a robust offering of services for students with learning differences. People from all over the country and the world move to Fairfax because our services are so good. Having said that, I know there are families of children with disabilities who are not happy with the services for their child. When this happens, it is essential to listen to parents, commit to understanding their concerns, and discuss how the school can help. It has been my experience that 99+% of the time, we can come to agreement on a viable plan for the student.</p> <p>Since students receiving special education services can attend high school until they are 23, we should expand the Secondary Transition to Employment Program (STEP) to more high schools.</p> <p>Areas of focus and other thoughts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• We must continue to implement the Science of Reading program and ensure all students have numeracy and literacy skills by third grade.• For those not reading, we must utilize reading specialists to get them on grade level.• We cannot wait until high school to do remedial reading with students.• Category A students in high school should be active participants in their own IEP and 504 meetings. This will help ensure that the accommodations received are needed and used.• We must do a better job working with our twice exceptional students. We must focus on their strengths and diversify instruction to allow students to tap into how they demonstrate learning best.
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QUESTION 9: SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS. *Do you support the current structure of the School Resource Officer program or would you recommend changes? For example, SROs are now permitted to arrest students for any violation of state and county codes, including low level offenses. Would you support limiting criminal investigations to serious violent actions that are not suitable for resolution through the disciplinary process?*

Robyn Lady	<p>We must have safe and inclusive schools. I fully support having SROs in our schools and would like to consider adding them to elementary schools.</p> <p>I will once again speak from experience. While SROs are allowed to arrest students for low level offenses, it seldom to never happens (at least in the schools where I worked). Most of them are well trained at diffusing situations and their uniform presence alone helps deescalate situations where student behavior is disruptive and threatening. Having said that, I think it is good practice to revisit the Memo of Understanding (MOU) with the Fairfax County Police Department on an annual basis and see if there should be any changes.</p>
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QUESTION 10: JOINT ENVIRONMENTAL TASK FORCE. *How will you assure that FCPS meets the climate recommendations for facilities and operations in the Joint Environmental Task Force Report, and assure that awareness of the climate crisis is an important part of the curriculum?*

Robyn Lady	<p>I would support efforts to require the Superintendent to create a detailed scaffolded plan for implementing the Joint Environmental Task (JET) Force directives. To ensure these initiatives are a priority, progression towards these directives should be part of the Superintendent's annual performance review. Additionally, energy efficiency begins in our schools and offices. While working in four different FCPS schools, I observed faculty and staff members with refrigerators and microwaves in their classroom and/or office. FCPS needs to make sure we have energy efficient refrigerators and microwaves in department workrooms and forbid faculty from having their own appliances.</p> <p>One Fairfax commits FCPS to conduct all its work with an equity lens. I am grateful the JET directives include a requirement that this be applied to our climate and sustainability work. When adding solar panels, we started with diverse Annandale High School and Mason Crest Elementary, a Title I school. The school division also made sure that our first electric buses would be used by all students – not just those who are affluent. It is incredibly important that green opportunities with career and technical education are prioritized with an equity lens. I also support the current science curriculum to ensure that students are learning about climate change in elementary school. We must also train our students to know how to fact check as misinformation about climate change appears in social media and other news outlets.</p>
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QUESTION 11: ALTERNATIVES TO COLLEGE PREP. *College is not a good path for every student upon graduation from high school. Do you support dedicated funding for technical and vocational skills and athletics, as well as programs for music and the arts? What other suggestions do you have to prepare these students for postgraduate life?*

Robyn Lady	<p>Absolutely! I spent almost my entire career in FCPS working at high schools that had Career and Technical Academies which are now known as STEM Governor's Academies. This transition took place around 2010 to gain recognition from the state and create a college going culture through our academies. While I support this academic course work, we lost classroom space for traditional trades. When building the master schedule at Chantilly High School, I saw firsthand how this impacted students looking for technical and vocational skills. Instead of adding sections of auto technology, carpentry, and auto collision as needed, we put 50+ students on a waitlist. At the same time, we added a new classroom for Exploring Health Sciences and Language of Medicine. As we look to the future, we must find a way to create classroom space for trades.</p> <p>As a former coach of five sports, I know firsthand how one's sport can open doors for our best athletes. We must support this pursuit of excellence and ensure that all our high school counselors are familiar with NCAA requirements. Additionally, if we paid our coaches better, they would be more qualified and committed to helping these young athletes.</p> <p>Finally, we must support and expand our arts programs. As the supervisor for Performing Arts at Chantilly I was frustrated and saddened when I learned that some of our feeder elementary and middle schools were cutting programs.</p>
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QUESTION 12: CHARTER SCHOOLS. *Under what circumstances, if any, would you be inclined as a member of the School Board to support a public charter school application presented to the Board? What legislative changes, if any, would you recommend that the General Assembly enact regarding charter schools, laboratory schools or other uses of public funds for private education?*

Robyn Lady	<p>Fairfax County Public Schools offers a world class education to all students. As a counselor and DSS I registered students from all over the country and world who moved to Fairfax because their parents knew they would receive an amazing education. To that end, we cannot move sacred tax dollars to charter schools. Instead, we need our delegates and senators to work at the state level to change the school funding formulas and ensure that more of our tax dollars come back to Fairfax County.</p>
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QUESTION 13: RESTORING CIVILITY. *School Board meetings have become disruptive and lacking in civility. How will you bring civility back?*

Robyn Lady	<p>This is very sad but true. The decorum of some community members during the public comment period at each Board meeting is inexcusable. The one thing I can do is model appropriate behavior. I would also like to investigate if the Superintendent and staff can study this issue and create a document indicating best practices and other recommendations for the public comment portion of the meetings moving forward.</p>
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FRANCONIA DISTRICT

Responding Candidate: Marcia St. John-Cunning

Did Not Respond: Kevin Pinkney

QUESTION 1: MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS: *There are several factors that have adversely impacted the mental health of students, teachers and staff in public schools, including bullying, active shooter drills, culture wars and the pandemic. What initiatives will you champion to address mental health needs in the Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) system?*

Marcia St. John-Cunning	<p>First and foremost is acknowledging that mental health needs for students, teachers and staff should be addressed by the FCPS system. The education of the whole child in today's society cannot only be limited to academics or left to educators alone. FCPS has taken steps to incorporate Social Emotional Learning (SEL) for students, yet it needs to ensure those lessons are taught by competent adults in the building. That means having more counselors, social workers, and psychologists in each school building whose mission it is to address the mental health needs of the students.</p> <p>If FCPS could recruit and retain more professionals qualified to meet the mental health needs of our students, it would go a long way in helping to relieve the stress on FCPS educators and staff. However, that is not enough.</p> <p>Encouraging authentic parent engagement to build strong school communities that work in partnership to support everyone in the building would be a foundational building block in addressing the mental health issues faced by students, teachers, and staff.</p>
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QUESTION 2: SCHOOL SAFETY. *The prospect of an active shooter is a serious safety concern. What steps do you recommend to ensure safety for everyone in our schools?*

Marcia St. John-Cunning	<p>As someone who currently works in a school building, I am aware of all the safety protocols FCPS has in place regarding the prospect of an active shooter. The front office staff is well trained to screen everyone that enters the building and ensure they sign in with a photo identification. All classroom doors are locked once students are in the classroom and each school has a safety and security team. Staff and students also regularly participate in active shooter drills. Every adult in every building I have worked in is prepared to protect every student in their school. Having said that, I feel the best steps we can take to ensure safety for everyone in our schools when it comes to the possibility of an active shooter, is to advocate for the sensible regulation of firearms in our community.</p>
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QUESTION 3: TEACHER SHORTAGE. *We have a growing teacher shortage. How will you address this issue?*

Marcia St. John-Cunning	<p>It is important to understand the "why" of the current teacher shortage. If you spend time in our schools, you will meet dedicated and qualified educators that are passionate about teaching. However, they are being burdened by extraneous tasks that pull from basic teaching and require hours of work outside of the classroom. The demands and expectations for teachers to solve every issue for every child are unrealistic and even the most committed and seasoned teachers are burning out. A great first step to empower teachers is the recent win for them to be able to participate in collective bargaining, so that they are adequately compensated. It is important to not lose sight of the fact that our educators need to be treated as the respected professionals they are and trusted to teach our students. A supportive workplace culture and climate not only benefits our educators, it benefits our children.</p>
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QUESTION 4: FACTUAL AND REPRESENTATIVE TEACHING. *Will you explicitly commit FCPS to teach history that is factually accurate, inclusive and age appropriate? How will you work to ensure that literature taught and available in libraries is representative and respects our diverse community of students, staff and families?*

Marcia St. John-Cunning	<p>Yes, I will absolutely commit FCPS to teach history that is factually accurate, inclusive and age appropriate. The greatest legacy we can leave to our children is a well-rounded, comprehensive education that develops critical thinking skills. This is what will allow them to fulfill their potential and to become productive and creative citizens. Exposing our students to literature that is representative of our diverse community is one of the best ways to ensure our students become global citizens. As a Latina that grew up in a bi-lingual household, I have experienced the value of reading literature by Hispanic authors and know how important it is for students to see themselves and their experiences in literature. As someone who works with a diverse community, I also know how valuable it is to have books available that represent our LGBTQ students and families, students and families with disabilities, and students and families of color.</p> <p>Additionally, I will work to make sure we have books in different languages, so non-English speaking students can access literature, and even for non-English speaking parents to be able to read books to their students. I have had the honor to work with dedicated and committed librarians and reading teachers, whose expertise and experience I trust. I have seen them search for books that will resonate with specific students and often purchase them from their own pockets and donate the books to the library or provide them to children. Their passion for assuring every student learns to love reading is only exceeded by their generosity of time and money to ensure children have books in their hands.</p>
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QUESTION 5: BOOK BANNING AND PARENTAL RIGHTS. *The issue of banning books and calls for expanded parental rights have become hot topics in school districts. How would you handle these issues? How does FCPS encourage parents' involvement in their children's education and what, if anything, needs to change?*

Marcia St. John-Cunning	<p>I am proud of the fact that FCPS has not banned any books to date and that calls to do so have in some cases inspired student-led opposition to such bans. It points to the fact that FCPS is doing an excellent job educating our students. Again, I go to trusting our educators and excellent school librarians to fill our school libraries with age-appropriate books that will develop lifelong readers.</p> <p>Unfortunately, the phrase "parental rights" has been co-opted to imply parents don't have rights. As a parent-liaison and community school coordinator, I have spent my career inviting and encouraging authentic parent involvement in our schools. From organizing parenting classes, facilitating parent-teacher conferences, one on one meetings to explain services and school programs, recruiting PTA/PTO Boards and members, parent supported after-school enrichment programs, parent led luncheons, activity and international nights, tutoring programs, to parent advocacy. FCPS welcomes parent voices and actively reaches out to marginalized communities in an effort to hear all parent voices. There is a small vocal minority that implies there is a lack of parental rights, when nothing can be further from the truth. As someone that has worked for years with parents, it is important to note that parent rights also include parent responsibility to partner in a respectful and authentic manner so that together our children receive the best education possible.</p>
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QUESTION 6: ADDRESSING DISPARITY. *Do you endorse the One Fairfax and School Trust policies? How will you lead the School Board in confronting racial and social inequities in all FCPS policies and practices? How will you address the disparity in academic achievement measures and discipline, and improve language access?*

Marcia St. John-Cunning	<p>Yes, I endorse the One Fairfax and School Trust policies. Throughout my career I have worked with immigrant communities and have seen the detrimental impact on families, students and communities when fear is a prevalent factor. Families who are forced to live in the shadows are often exploited and will not seek the support and help they or their children qualify to receive. Support that can move the family and student to becoming integral and productive citizens in our community and prevent them from being exploited by unscrupulous individuals. Trust is essential in order to prevent our marginalized families from living in fear.</p> <p>FCPS and Fairfax County have robust Equity teams in place that are working hard to dismantle systemic racial and social inequities in FCPS policies and practices. It is a work in progress that will require consistent and intentional work by all the key stakeholders in Fairfax County and our FCPS system. As a School Board member, I will continue to support this work and advocate for its expansion.</p> <p>My FCPS career has been in South County and I will work hard to highlight and address some of the FCPS inequities regarding access to resources for the South County community. As systemic barriers are dismantled, new evidenced based programming can be explored to address the disparity in academic achievement for racial, linguistic minority, socio-economically disadvantaged students, and students with disabilities, as well as the disparity in discipline faced by said students.</p>
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QUESTION 7: LGBTQ+ STUDENTS. *What steps, if any, do you believe should be taken to protect and affirm LGBTQ+ students? Current FCPS Regulation 2603 gives students agency on sharing and expressing their gender identity and sexual orientation and does not authorize schools to share this information without their permission. Do you believe this should remain standard practice in FCPS?*

Marcia St. John-Cunning	LGBTQ+ students deserve to be protected and affirmed just like any and every FCPS student. They need to feel safe, secure and valued in every school and in every classroom by every adult in the building. FCPS confidentiality policies are strict and exist to protect each and every student and staff member. There is absolutely no reason why this practice should be deviated from in any way for any reason regarding any student due to race, creed, economic status, immigration status, sexual orientation or gender identity status.
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QUESTION 8: SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES. *FCPS is required to provide a free and appropriate public education to students who are identified as needing an IEP or 504 plan. What are your policy goals related to Special Education services? Families of children with disabilities often express frustration with the services and education provided. How will you ensure that every child in FCPS receives an equitable education regardless of their abilities?*

Marcia St. John-Cunning	<p>I have worked with many families who have moved to Fairfax County, specifically because of the quality of the Special Education services offered by FCPS. I am aware that frustrations exist with how services for some students are delivered and I will listen to parents and work with the division to find solutions to best meet the needs of their students.</p> <p>In my capacity as an FCPS interpreter and parent liaison, I have sat in hundreds of IEP meetings. One of things that has become clear is how time consuming and daunting the IEP/504 plan process is for parents to understand. When I first started working at FCPS there was a Special Education administrative assistant in each school who arranged all the IEP/504 plans meetings for the school team and coordinated with the parents. This individual had the time to explain the process to the parent before the fact which helped both the educators and the families begin on a better footing from the onset. This was extremely beneficial to all families, but especially to non-English speaking families who required more time and attention to understand the process. I will advocate to restore these positions, which will not only help our families understand the process but will also reduce the administrative burden on our teachers, counselors, and school administrators. Finally, it is important to not leave our twice-exceptional and/or non-English speaking students behind when it comes to Special Education needs.</p>
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QUESTION 9: SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS. *Do you support the current structure of the School Resource Officer program or would you recommend changes? For example, SROs are now permitted to arrest students for any violation of state and county codes, including low level offenses. Would you support limiting criminal investigations to serious violent actions that are not suitable for resolution through the disciplinary process?*

Marcia St. John-Cunning	<p>I would like to evaluate the structure of the School Resource officer program to determine the reasoning of what protocols are followed for low level offenses. There is a great deal of data that needs to be teased out to determine the efficacy of current policies. The type and quantity of offenses, the number of interventions provided, and demographic information are only a few of such data points. However, just as an IEP recommends the "least restrictive environment," disciplinary action should follow suit with every avenue in the FCPS disciplinary process pursued before an arrest is made. Although rare, there are serious and violent actions that preclude the FCPS disciplinary route.</p> <p>I would be interested in learning about the type of training and requirements the Fairfax Police department requires of their officers before they are placed in a school and have to interact with students.</p>
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QUESTION 10: JOINT ENVIRONMENTAL TASK FORCE. *How will you assure that FCPS meets the climate recommendations for facilities and operations in the Joint Environmental Task Force Report, and assure that awareness of the climate crisis is an important part of the curriculum?*

Marcia St. John-Cunning	<p>I saw a dramatic change made in FCPS when LEED practices were introduced and followed in an effort to increase energy savings and reduce the carbon imprint. FCPS must continue to follow the JET task force recommendations with fidelity in order to meet the goal. Communicating the goals to administrators, educators and staff is crucial, as well as providing best practices guidelines to be effectively practiced at each individual school.</p> <p>Students at every level are keenly aware of the importance of being good stewards of our planet and natural resources. They want to be engaged and do their part which provides us with an excellent opportunity to introduce age-appropriate curriculum regarding how to best care for our communities' natural resources. Partnering with organizations that teach students how to compost, grow and harvest food ties into multiple discipline areas (science, health, citizenship, commerce) and provides enrichment opportunities for our students without putting all the burden on educators. Collaborating with successful non-profits and seeking grant funding will help build a greater sense of community and responsibility for our students and families.</p>
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QUESTION 11: ALTERNATIVES TO COLLEGE PREP. *College is not a good path for every student upon graduation from high school. Do you support dedicated funding for technical and vocational skills and athletics, as well as programs for music and the arts? What other suggestions do you have to prepare these students for postgraduate life?*

Marcia St. John-Cunning	<p>Yes, I support dedicated funding for technical and vocational skills as well as for athletic, musical and arts programs. The value of technical and vocational skills in our society is critical and as such those paths need to receive the same recognition as paths to college.</p> <p>FCPS offers strong Academy programs, but as a Board we need to be mindful about accessibility for all students. Career and technical education should be intentionally expanded to provide FCPS students with the skill set needed to fill the countless positions currently available in the workforce being left unmet due to lack of skilled personnel. Funding should be strategic in an effort to ensure all students have access to participate in Academy programs.</p> <p>Athletic, music and art programs can develop skills in students that can be used to launch a career, earn a scholarship to finance higher education, and feel a sense of belonging in their school community. My daughter benefited greatly from The Musical Theatre Academy program, which equipped her with all the necessary skills to successfully audition for spots in college theater programs.</p>
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QUESTION 12: CHARTER SCHOOLS. *Under what circumstances, if any, would you be inclined as a member of the School Board to support a public charter school application presented to the Board? What legislative changes, if any, would you recommend that the General Assembly enact regarding charter schools, laboratory schools or other uses of public funds for private education?*

Marcia St. John-Cunning	<p>The cornerstone of our community and democracy is a free public education that is equitable, accessible and inclusive. FCPS has consistently been ranked as the best in the country while serving a diverse cultural and socio-economic student population. At a time when we are facing learning gaps and loss due to the pandemic, it is not wise to siphon public funds to support private and or charter schools that would not be serving our entire community. It goes against the One Fairfax policy commitment to equity.</p>
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QUESTION 13: RESTORING CIVILITY. *School Board meetings have become disruptive and lacking in civility. How will you bring civility back?*

Marcia St. John-Cunning	<p>As a member of the School Board, my responsibility is to represent my district with integrity and dignity. I will work hard to build mutually respectful and trusting relationships with all the members on the Board and work in good faith for the best possible outcomes for our students. Unfortunately, I cannot control the behavior of individuals that participate in public meetings. To the extent that modeling appropriate behavior is not only best practice it is often the best "teacher," it is my hope that if the Board listens respectfully and with dignity, individuals addressing the Board will do likewise.</p>
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HUNTER MILL DISTRICT

Responding Candidates: Melanie Meren

Did Not Respond: Harold Jackson

QUESTION 1: MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS: *There are several factors that have adversely impacted the mental health of students, teachers and staff in public schools, including bullying, active shooter drills, culture wars and the pandemic. What initiatives will you champion to address mental health needs in the Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) system?*

Melanie Meren

Solutions and relief are to be implemented within our public schools, and also outside our schools. Schools alone cannot conquer the mental health crisis in our community.

I'll continue advocating for and funding existing explicit instruction in proven, "social and emotional learning" techniques, so students learn how to regulate their emotions, make healthy choices, treat others respectfully, and seek help when needed. I advocate for embedded SEL content elsewhere, such as Family Life Education, so students learn the value of building healthy relationships and what to do if they or their friends are in danger. I've advocated for expanding instruction to prevent eating disorders and bullying, and advocated for restorative justice. I will hold the Superintendent accountable for not only providing employment benefits that include mental health coverage and services, but also creating a work environment that is humane and safe for adults. Ultimately, decreasing class size will allow for building relationships among staff, students, and families that are the bedrock for identifying and addressing students' emerging mental and physical health needs.

I have consistently sought investments, partnerships, and services from community partners they must do their share. I'll keep working with County officials and health care and educating them with data about the growing need for supports like mental health services and in-patient treatment centers, for example. I have fostered an excellent report with the VA Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and have brokered conversations with school division leadership for the benefit of our students.

QUESTION 2: SCHOOL SAFETY. *The prospect of an active shooter is a serious safety concern. What steps do you recommend to ensure safety for everyone in our schools?*

Melanie Meren	<p>Our schools have some responsibility, but the community has more. Nonetheless, since that aid is not forthcoming, I've had to do more given the community's increased concern about the vulnerability of students and staff in our facilities.</p> <p>Parents have asked me for bullet-proof doors and windows, full fencing around schools, and windowless buildings. A fourth grader asked me recently if I'm in charge of helping teachers get trained to know what to do; a parent asked me to fund security guards at every school.</p> <p>Until now, I've responded with information about FCPS' strategies, and that ultimately, it's about access to guns in the community and we all need to share that responsibility. Please see this 2022 newsletter for my summary of what FCPS does to try and protect people from gun violence. However, educating people doesn't seem like it's enough anymore.</p> <p>I do not support hardening schools - that is, installing metal detectors and arming teachers. However, I support doing more to fortify our entrance ways - which is why I presented the successful motion to fund installation of secure entryway vestibules in schools.</p> <p>Lately I am rethinking my position on School Resource Officers - previously my concern about the documented negative impact on students of color in discipline matters framed my thinking. However, principals resoundingly say they need SROs. I am inclined to support SROs, with on-going training and assessment about how their work is antiracist and focused on threats - not student discipline matters.</p>
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QUESTION 3: TEACHER SHORTAGE. *We have a growing teacher shortage. How will you address this issue?*

Melanie Meren	<p>Public education is in a crisis of losing teachers from the profession. This problem stems from public opinion and treatment of educators; inadequate teacher preparation programs in colleges to meet the needs of today's learners; and finally, working conditions in public schools that include limited pay due to tax revenue base limitations, the pressure to meet state standards, and magnified public opinion reflecting a lack of trust for educators.</p> <p>I have worked to retain our teachers via Board-approved compensation increases with across-the-division pay raises, and particular increases to bring pay parity to elementary school principals, special educators, instructional aides, school bus drivers, and substitute teachers. I just recently voted to approve collective bargaining, giving employment rights to staff for the first time in Fairfax, ever.</p> <p>Teachers' working conditions are students' learning conditions, and for that reason, I have and will champion our teachers and instructors as the top critical resource in our public schools.</p>
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QUESTION 4: FACTUAL AND REPRESENTATIVE TEACHING. *Will you explicitly commit FCPS to teach history that is factually accurate, inclusive and age appropriate? How will you work to ensure that literature taught and available in libraries is representative and respects our diverse community of students, staff and families?*

Melanie Meren	<p>Yes. I began advocating in 2018 for more antiracist, historically accurate and inclusive history prior to my election to the School Board in 2019. Please see the content here. Once elected, I convened constituents and collected their input on the proposed standards, in 2021, and submitted detailed recommendations to the state. I also hosted a town hall about anti-bias curriculum.</p> <p>In 2022, I was one of just three School Board Members who defended the community-supported Teach Truth Resolution for vote by the School Board. I voted against a weakened version of what passed in its place, in a vote of 8-3.</p> <p>In 2023, I shared remarks on Martin Luther King Day in Reston. Also already in 2023, the School Board and Superintendent sent a letter to the state with a detailed analysis as to why the current proposed standards are egregious, and insulting to the humanity and intellect of Virginia’s residents - past, current, and future. I continue to speak up and educate my constituents so together we seek action. And I educate my constituents about upcoming opportunities to vote - because elections have consequences, as we are so dreadfully experiencing.</p>
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QUESTION 5: BOOK BANNING AND PARENTAL RIGHTS. *The issue of banning books and calls for expanded parental rights have become hot topics in school districts. How would you handle these issues? How does FCPS encourage parents’ involvement in their children’s education and what, if anything, needs to change?*

Melanie Meren	<p>I already have been doing this work while on the School Board.</p> <p>First, I engage parents by being in places where they are, so we can have dialogues. I also spend time sharing the Board’s work in an accessible way, largely via my newsletter to 30,000 community members, and the responses I receive are very positive - parents appreciate better understanding what’s happening in the school division, even if they don’t have time for deep dives into information.</p> <p>As Chair of the Board’s Public Engagement Committee, a communications professional, and a parent of two FCPS students currently, I have worked since 2020 to bring recommendations to the Board and Superintendent that strengthen FCPS communications to families. I’ve also worked to increase language translation and interpretation services, as well as supported Board action to expand the availability and compensation of Family Liaisons.</p> <p>Finally, regarding book banning: I have combed FCPS policy and regulation to be sure it is clear in process for challenging materials, and air tight in its protection of the school division’s commitment to recognizing all of our students’ experiences in our materials, under the law. I have pledged my allegiance to our expert school librarians who curate collections that help developing children reach their potential by feeling safe and seen. I have informed parents about their rights to review curriculum, books, and materials, and I listen to parents who find certain content inappropriate.</p>
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QUESTION 6: ADDRESSING DISPARITY. *Do you endorse the One Fairfax and School Trust policies? How will you lead the School Board in confronting racial and social inequities in all FCPS policies and practices? How will you address the disparity in academic achievement measures and discipline, and improve language access?*

Melanie Meren	<p>Yes; I voted in support of the School Trust policy in April 2022, and was a steadfast supporter since it was introduced months prior.</p> <p>Relatedly, from above, I've supported the Truth in Teaching Resolution, advocated for antiracist social studies standards and content, and worked to have translation and interpretation services for School Board materials and meetings, respectively.</p> <p>Further, I support the Equitable Access to Literacy instructional plan, for which the School Board approved funding for FCPS-wide alignment of curriculum and educator training in the science of reading instruction. I championed this adoption in FCPS as well as the bi-partisan Virginia Literacy Act that passed in 2022.</p> <p>Also, I have sought academic parity among students by using results from Board-directed studies about advanced academic instruction and twice-exceptional students ("2e"); special education; and non-core academic instructional offerings, including world language and arts education, to make funding decisions that expand access to these opportunities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If re-elected, I will keep working to provide: Opportunities for students to grapple with complex topics such as America's – and especially Virginia's - undeniable role in participating in the brutality of slavery as an economic strategy, the implications of which are still with us today• Learning environments that reduce and ultimately eradicate bullying and hate speech – whether spoken or inscribed as vandalism – targeting one's personal or cultural identities.
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QUESTION 7: LGBTQ+ STUDENTS. *What steps, if any, do you believe should be taken to protect and affirm LGBTQ+ students? Current FCPS Regulation 2603 gives students agency on sharing and expressing their gender identity and sexual orientation and does not authorize schools to share this information without their permission. Do you believe this should remain standard practice in FCPS?*

Melanie Meren	<p>I completely support this regulation, and yes, it should remain standard practice. Thus far, I have defended it when confronted by individuals who challenge this regulation. It's simply a matter of safety and respect that we have these protections, directives, and guidance in place.</p> <p>One course of action is to turn to the curriculum: the more we can educate our students - and train and support our educators - about the need for the acknowledgement and acceptance of one's gender identity and sexual orientation and their individual rights, we will beat down the hateful core of what threatens us.</p> <p>Another course of action is to sue the Governor and the state to prevent overturning of our regulation, and I am ready to recommend and gather support for that among my colleagues, to direct the Superintendent.</p>
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QUESTION 8: SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES. *FCPS is required to provide a free and appropriate public education to students who are identified as needing an IEP or 504 plan. What are your policy goals related to Special Education services? Families of children with disabilities often express frustration with the services and education provided. How will you ensure that every child in FCPS receives an equitable education regardless of their abilities?*

Melanie Meren	<p>Special education services must be integrated into all aspects of learning in FCPS. Special education is not a siloed experience or offering that can even be the same for each child. I supported the School Board's commission of an extensive audit of special education; I discussed in detail at the 4/11 Board public work session what's needed for transformation. I am squarely in the space of creating change for greater access to equitable learning so each can meet their ability. I've supported Board-directed studies about advanced academic instruction and twice-exceptional students ("2e"), to best inform funding decisions to expand access.</p> <p>I will continue working on the Board to hold the Superintendent accountable for strategies that can help: time for staff planning to accommodate needs; training of staff to understand how to best instruct students with needs; more strongly-designed Individualized Educational Plans, that are accessible to the variety of understanding and literacy abilities of our parents and families.</p> <p>As a Board Member I approved the creation of a Neurodiversity Specialist position, a unique position in the US! I also champion the publicly-appointed, state-required Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities as a resource for FCPS staff's work.</p> <p>Finally, as a parent with current FCPS students who have identified needs, I understand the experience families, students, and staff are going through. Having the parent's perspective plus that of my constituents to inform me about areas for improvement allows me to improve instruction for our students with identified needs.</p> <p>Ultimately, decreasing class size will greatly help all students meet their identified needs.</p>
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QUESTION 9: SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS. *Do you support the current structure of the School Resource Officer program or would you recommend changes? For example, SROs are now permitted to arrest students for any violation of state and county codes, including low level offenses. Would you support limiting criminal investigations to serious violent actions that are not suitable for resolution through the disciplinary process?*

Melanie Meren	<p>I approved continued focus on the SRO program, at the 4/11 public work session of the Board. I am eager to hear about latest research and thinking given the threat of gun violence, as I shared above in Question #2. Once I understand the data about how SROs are performing in our schools, I can better recommend next steps for this program. That said:</p> <p>I do not support SROs being able to arrest students - especially our youngest students.</p> <p>I do support limiting criminal investigations to serious violent actions that are not suitable for resolution through the disciplinary process.</p> <p>Much of the authority of SROs lies in state code. I have advocated to the General Assembly for such changes, including limiting school staff, such as principals/administrators, with the responsibility of defining criminal activity.</p>
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QUESTION 10: JOINT ENVIRONMENTAL TASK FORCE. *How will you assure that FCPS meets the climate recommendations for facilities and operations in the Joint Environmental Task Force Report, and assure that awareness of the climate crisis is an important part of the curriculum?*

Melanie Meren	<p>First, the JET goals are now adopted as FCPS Board Directives, due in part to my vote. Second, I am working to help establish a Policy Governance model by which the Superintendent's evaluation will be measured publicly, in accordance with our policies. This will ensure the Board is up-to-date on progress and needs.</p> <p>Also, due to my work now on the Board's Governance Committee, the Superintendent is conducting a holistic review of all transportation and facilities policies. Many policies have not met their required 5-year review over the tenure of previous Boards, and furthermore, have not been reviewed in totality to ensure alignment across the CIP, JET Goals, and budget investments. I have also:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Championed Net-Zero design standards for all-new buildings, and Net-Zero-ready for renovations, into adoption. Voted to adopt contracts to use renewable energy, including installing solar on schools and increasing electric school buses in the fleet.2. Ensuring cross-division alignment and implementation with environmental protection and sustainability goals - through the current holistic review of all transportation and facilities in which I'm participating.3. Brought the planning and over \$6 million in budgeted funds forward to install safe and accessible outdoor classrooms to spec in all FCPS schools, plus teacher training! This is important for students to learn the STEM content needed to go into green careers that will combat climate change, and to encourage environmental stewardship to conserve and protect the environment. <p><i>Continued next page</i></p>
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	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Advised individual schools on creating sustainable practices and fostering environmental education programs, particularly to advance the FCPS' Get2Green curriculum. 5. Voted to adopt contracts to use renewable energy, including installing solar on schools and increasing electric school buses in the fleet. 6. Ensuring cross-division alignment and implementation with environmental protection and sustainability goals - through the current holistic review of all transportation and facilities in which I'm participating. 7. Brought the planning and over \$6 million in budgeted funds forward to install safe and accessible outdoor classrooms to spec in all FCPS schools, plus teacher training! This is important for students to learn the STEM content needed to go into green careers that will combat climate change, and to encourage environmental stewardship to conserve and protect the environment. 8. Advised individual schools on creating sustainable practices and fostering environmental education programs, particularly to advance the FCPS' Get2Green curriculum.
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QUESTION 11: ALTERNATIVES TO COLLEGE PREP. *College is not a good path for every student upon graduation from high school. Do you support dedicated funding for technical and vocational skills and athletics, as well as programs for music and the arts? What other suggestions do you have to prepare these students for postgraduate life?*

Melanie Meren	<p>I support dedicated funding for career and technical education (CTE), and programs for the music and arts - absolutely!</p> <p>Please see this compilation about my support of and work to expand CTE opportunities and needs, published in my December 2022 newsletter.</p> <p>Most recently, I am now advocating to right-size the stipends for our secondary school music and performing arts educators. This was born out of direct advocacy to me, by educators evidence that I am a trusted partner for educators who seek to advocate for their needs. You can hear my remarks from the March 30 public School Board meeting, here.</p>
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QUESTION 12: CHARTER SCHOOLS. *Under what circumstances, if any, would you be inclined as a member of the School Board to support a public charter school application presented to the Board? What legislative changes, if any, would you recommend that the General Assembly enact regarding charter schools, laboratory schools or other uses of public funds for private education?*

Melanie Meren	<p>I do not support approving a public charter school in this political climate. Charter schools are intended to be incubators of change; however, history - such as in Washington, DC - has shown that the schools rarely repeat their best practices and gains to bring more change about. With the political climate being so unsupportive of public schools, I will not support additional measures to further remove investments and resources from established public schools into new schools run by a charter organization. I continue to advocate against constitutional changes in Virginia regarding expansion of charter schools.</p>
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QUESTION 13: RESTORING CIVILITY. *School Board meetings have become disruptive and lacking in civility. How will you bring civility back?*

Melanie Meren	<p>I have sat through hundreds of School Board meetings over the past 4 years - and having missed only a handful - I can attest that indeed, meetings have become disruptive and lacking in civility.</p> <p>I'd like the Board to be stronger in rejecting hate speech and mischaracterization of groups of people, like our Queer folx, during public comments at Board meetings. Allowing public speakers to refer to individuals or a whole group of people as "groomers" or "pedophiles" is uncivil, hurtful, and dangerous - it desensitizes the public to the harm such true actors bring. And then this language gets recorded and shared. A change could be worked on by the Public Engagement Committee, to bring forth stronger policy on this matter.</p> <p>I have persevered in this role since 2020. I have endured making decisions regarding a global public health pandemic; international cyberterrorism attacks; legal suits being heard in local courts and the U.S. Supreme Court. On this Board, I've sued the Governor for the constitutionally-provided right of a School Board for local control, such as our right to decide on requiring masks in our buildings. I voted to change the admissions policy to the most visible high school in the nation, drawing the ire and legal attacks of the Governor, Attorney General, and right-wing-funded opposition. I seek to remain in this role to continue my defense of public education in this hostile political environment, and to reaffirm the necessity and value of public education.</p>
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MASON DISTRICT

Did Not Respond: Ricardy Anderson, Kristin Ball

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MOUNT VERNON DISTRICT

Responding Candidate: Mateo Dunne

Did Not Respond: Stori Zimmerman

QUESTION 1: MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS: *There are several factors that have adversely impacted the mental health of students, teachers and staff in public schools, including bullying, active shooter drills, culture wars and the pandemic. What initiatives will you champion to address mental health needs in the Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) system?*

Mateo Dunne	<p>To support the mental health of our students, I will advocate for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● The County to fund a dedicated school nurse at every elementary, middle, and high school;● Hiring additional school counselors, with a minimum of one school counselor for every 200 students;● Establishment (and consistent implementation across schools) of effective protocols for anxiety, depression, and other conditions;● Maintaining regulations and School Board policies that protect and support LGBTQ+ students;● A comprehensive anti-bullying, anti-sexual assault, and anti-violence education campaign for students, featuring facilitated small-group discussions by school counselors;● Provision of intervention and counseling for kids at risk;● The State and County to fund treatment on demand for kids at risk;● Establishment and expansion of restorative justice practices for repairing harm and restoring relationships; and● Establishment and expansion of peer support programs in elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools.
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QUESTION 2: SCHOOL SAFETY. *The prospect of an active shooter is a serious safety concern. What steps do you recommend to ensure safety for everyone in our schools?*

Mateo Dunne	<p>The Federal Government and the Commonwealth of Virginia should enact legislation to restrict the sale, distribution, and ownership of weapons, ammunition, and accessories that are designed or intended for use on the battlefield.</p> <p>In the absence of effective gun control legislation at the Federal and State levels, and to safeguard our children from internal and external threats, I will advocate for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● The installation of efficient and non-invasive security screening technology (such as Evolv Technology) at every school entrance to identify weapons and other threats; <p><i>Continued next page</i></p>
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- Installation of high-technology video cameras throughout school buildings, supported by machine-learning and artificial intelligence to identify potential threats;
- A security survey to be conducted of every elementary, middle, and high school;
- A renewed emphasis on school security in the design and renovation of school buildings, to include reduced building footprints;
- Reinforcement of entryways to school buildings, to include but not limited to vestibules;
- Joint coordination and planning by FCPD and FCPS (to include tabletop and real-world exercises) to ensure preparedness for every scenario; and
- Efficient (and continuous) background checks for school personnel and volunteers.

In addition, I will advocate for an independent study of the FCPD School Resource Officer program and FCPS Safety & Security Assistant program to evaluate their efficacy, outcomes, and staffing.

QUESTION 3: TEACHER SHORTAGE. *We have a growing teacher shortage. How will you address this issue?*

Mateo Dunne

To address the local teacher shortage, I will advocate for FCPS to:

- Honor teachers as professionals;
- Hire additional teachers to reduce class sizes;
- Provide teachers with the highest pay in Northern Virginia;
- Empower teachers to educate our children instead of teaching to the test;
- Conduct an independent study of the administrative burdens imposed on teachers;
- Ensure every teacher has full use of their planning time, without infringement by administrative burdens and meetings;
- Establish additional time (separate from planning time) for collaboration within and across departments; and
- Assign school counselors (instead of math and history teachers) to teach subject matter like Family Life Education and Social Emotional Learning.

Through the negotiation of the Collective Bargaining Agreement, FCPS should seek to:

- Establish a career ladder that provides teachers with opportunities for advancement inside the classroom as well as increased compensation, recognition, and responsibilities;
- Establish financial incentives for experienced teachers to teach (and remain) in Title I schools;
- Establish a tuition reimbursement program to reward teachers who remain with FCPS for 7 years; and
- Ensure full reimbursement for any school supplies purchased by teachers out of pocket.

In addition, FCPS should work with the County to identify opportunities to expand workforce housing available to teachers and staff. I strongly believe that public servants—from teachers and custodians to police and firefighters—who work daily to maintain the quality of life in Fairfax County should have the option to live in Fairfax County with their families.

I would also advocate for an independent evaluation of the needs-based staffing formula to determine if adjustments are required to provide additional teachers for students in need.

QUESTION 4: FACTUAL AND REPRESENTATIVE TEACHING. *Will you explicitly commit FCPS to teach history that is factually accurate, inclusive and age appropriate? How will you work to ensure that literature taught and available in libraries is representative and respects our diverse community of students, staff and families?*

Mateo Dunne	<p>I will fight tooth and nail, day in and day out, to ensure that students in Fairfax County are taught history that is factually accurate, inclusive, and age appropriate. On March 14, 2023, I spoke in opposition to Gov. Youngkin’s proposed revisions to the History and Social Science Standards of Learning at the VDOE hearing at Mount Vernon. I believe that his proposed revisions promote rote memorization rather than critical thinking. In addition, his proposed revisions distort history by minimizing the historical achievements and contributions of women, African Americans, Asian Americans, Indigenous Americans, and labor unions.</p> <p>I oppose book bans. I will work tirelessly to ensure that students have access to literature that is inclusive and age appropriate.</p>
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QUESTION 5: BOOK BANNING AND PARENTAL RIGHTS. *The issue of banning books and calls for expanded parental rights have become hot topics in school districts. How would you handle these issues? How does FCPS encourage parents’ involvement in their children’s education and what, if anything, needs to change?*

Mateo Dunne	<p>Parents are responsible for the education of their children. By law, they have the right to educate their children at home, at a private school, or at a public school.</p> <p>I believe that the School Board needs to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Listen to students, parents, and community members; ● Focus on renewing the promise of public education and providing all children with a world-class education; and ● Ensure that FCPS is transparent and accountable. <p>I oppose book bans. I will work tirelessly to ensure that students have access to literature that is inclusive and age appropriate.</p>
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QUESTION 6: ADDRESSING DISPARITY. *Do you endorse the One Fairfax and School Trust policies? How will you lead the School Board in confronting racial and social inequities in all FCPS policies and practices? How will you address the disparity in academic achievement measures and discipline, and improve language access?*

Mateo Dunne	<p>I support the One Fairfax policy and the School Trust policy.</p> <p>FCPS must confront the stubborn reality that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Many children do not have enough food to eat at home, especially on weekends and during the summer; ● Many children have parents who are new to this country and may not have received the same educational opportunities in their home country; ● Many children suffer from health issues ranging from anxiety and depression to drugs and trauma; and ● There is a persistent academic achievement gap. <p><i>Continued next page</i></p>
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	<p>Here is what I believe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● FCPS should provide a safe and inclusive environment for every child; ● FCPS should provide a world-class education to every child, so they have the opportunity to realize the American Dream; ● FCPS should never compromise on high expectations and high standards; ● FCPS should provide every child with the opportunity to identify and develop their interests and strengths; and ● FCPS should provide wraparound services for every child in need to help them realize their full potential. <p>We must meet every child where they are and provide them with the resources to be successful inside and outside of the classroom and to be prepared for the workforce or higher education. I will be relentless in challenging FCPS to be more efficient and effective, to meet the needs of every child, and to ensure every school is performing in accordance with this essential mission.</p>
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QUESTION 7: LGBTQ+ STUDENTS. *What steps, if any, do you believe should be taken to protect and affirm LGBTQ+ students? Current FCPS Regulation 2603 gives students agency on sharing and expressing their gender identity and sexual orientation and does not authorize schools to share this information without their permission. Do you believe this should remain standard practice in FCPS?*

Mateo Dunne	<p>I will advocate to maintain regulations and School Board policies that protect and support LGBTQ+ students—the strongest in Virginia. I will also advocate for (i) the construction of accessible and gender-neutral bathrooms at every elementary school, middle school, and high school; and (ii) the construction of accessible and gender-neutral locker rooms and showers at every middle school and high school.</p>
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QUESTION 8: SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES. *FCPS is required to provide a free and appropriate public education to students who are identified as needing an IEP or 504 plan. What are your policy goals related to Special Education services? Families of children with disabilities often express frustration with the services and education provided. How will you ensure that every child in FCPS receives an equitable education regardless of their abilities?*

Mateo Dunne	<p>I believe that the School Board needs to focus on renewing the promise of public education and ensuring that FCPS provides all children with a world-class education, to include children with disabilities. Towards this end, I support the full implementation of the 2021 Special Education Audit, specifically the recommendations outlined in Exhibit 37 on pages 122 to 132.</p>
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QUESTION 9: SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS. *Do you support the current structure of the School Resource Officer program or would you recommend changes? For example, SROs are now permitted to arrest students for any violation of state and county codes, including low level offenses. Would you support limiting criminal investigations to serious violent actions that are not suitable for resolution through the disciplinary process?*

Mateo Dunne	<p>In 2018, I played a leading role in the negotiation of a new MOU between FCPD and FCPS, which clarified the roles and responsibilities of School Resource Officers (SROs). Under the MOU, SROs have no involvement in school discipline.</p> <p>I will advocate for an independent study of the FCPD School Resource Officer program and FCPS Safety & Security Assistant program to evaluate their efficacy, outcomes, and staffing.</p> <p>I will work tirelessly to eliminate the school-to-prison pipeline, which has caused incalculable damage to minority families and communities. I believe that SROs should be encouraged to pursue alternative solutions before making an arrest, such as restorative justice or Diversion First. However, I believe that SROs should have the discretion to make an arrest if necessary.</p>
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QUESTION 10: JOINT ENVIRONMENTAL TASK FORCE. *How will you assure that FCPS meets the climate recommendations for facilities and operations in the Joint Environmental Task Force Report, and assure that awareness of the climate crisis is an important part of the curriculum?*

Mateo Dunne	<p>The JET goals are a starting point, but we can do better. I support the existing goals because they are better than nothing, but they are also unsatisfactory.</p> <p>I believe using the 2019 baseline is a mistake. I believe that every climate agreement and policy should utilize 1990 levels as the baseline from which to measure reductions. Emissions in 2019 were approximately 4 percent higher than in 1990 (source: EPA, "Inventory of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks"), so using 2019 levels represents the <i>de facto</i> acceptance of emissions at a higher level.</p> <p>I believe that the goals are not aggressive enough. I believe that FCPS should aim for "net zero" by 2030. Having worked in the energy sector for 15 years, I know that rapid gains are readily achievable, often at lower cost than expected. It only takes the political will to establish the goals, establish a clear plan with SMART milestones, and ensure their implementation.</p> <p>I believe that FCPS should hold the Superintendent accountable by developing SMART milestones to be incorporated into her performance standards, and instructing the Superintendent to hold regional Superintendents accountable via the same method. Linking performance to milestone delivery will ensure that the school administrators have a vested interest in achieving these milestones.</p> <p>FCPS does not have a strong track record when it comes to meeting environmental commitments. The real expertise lies outside the four walls of Gatehouse and Willow Oaks where the FCPS bureaucracy resides. FCPS should utilize public-private partnerships and outside contractors to accelerate the realization of the net zero goals. Without specifying a preferred approach, FCPS should publish a request for information to solicit proposals from the private sector on how net zero could be achieved by 2030. For example, there are many companies that specialize in the installation and leasing of utility equipment, to include solar panels. Given the potential dollar value of this contract, FCPS would attract a wide range of ideas and bidders, which would offer FCPS the opportunity to partner with an outside company that will provide the necessary expertise and services at low or reduced cost to FCPS.</p>
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QUESTION 11: ALTERNATIVES TO COLLEGE PREP. *College is not a good path for every student upon graduation from high school. Do you support dedicated funding for technical and vocational skills and athletics, as well as programs for music and the arts? What other suggestions do you have to prepare these students for postgraduate life?*

Mateo Dunne	<p>Through Career and Technical Education, two of my children discovered a passion for military service. One is enrolled in the Army ROTC program at Virginia Tech, and the other has enlisted in the Virginia National Guard.</p> <p>I will advocate for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The establishment and expansion of dual enrollment programs, so students can graduate from high school with an associate degree; ● The establishment and expansion of Career and Technical Education at every middle school and high school; ● The establishment and expansion of apprenticeship programs with local businesses; ● The establishment and expansion of certification programs with local businesses to enable students to graduate from high school with certifications required to apply for diverse jobs; and ● Continued dialogue with local businesses to ensure that the FCPS CTE curriculum is responsive to the needs of the private sector and is preparing students for immediate entry into the workforce.
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QUESTION 12: CHARTER SCHOOLS. *Under what circumstances, if any, would you be inclined as a member of the School Board to support a public charter school application presented to the Board? What legislative changes, if any, would you recommend that the General Assembly enact regarding charter schools, laboratory schools or other uses of public funds for private education?*

Mateo Dunne	<p>I oppose the establishment of charter schools in Virginia.</p> <p>I oppose the use of public funds for private education.</p>
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QUESTION 13: RESTORING CIVILITY. *School Board meetings have become disruptive and lacking in civility. How will you bring civility back?*

Mateo Dunne	<p>First, the School Board needs to listen to students, parents, and community members.</p> <p>Second, the School Board needs to focus on renewing the promise of public education and ensuring that FCPS provides all children with a world-class education.</p> <p>Third, School Board members should ensure that FCPS is transparent and accountable.</p> <p>To rebuild public trust, I will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consult with the community early and often; ● Listen to community concerns and priorities; ● Learn about the needs of different families and students as well as administrators, teachers, and staff; and ● Serve as an effective advocate for community concerns and priorities.
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PROVIDENCE DISTRICT

Responding Candidate: Karl Frisch

Did Not Respond: Anthony Sabio

QUESTION 1: MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS: *There are several factors that have adversely impacted the mental health of students, teachers and staff in public schools, including bullying, active shooter drills, culture wars and the pandemic. What initiatives will you champion to address mental health needs in the Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) system?*

Karl Frisch	<p>Fairfax County Public Schools recently began offering all high school students free virtual mental health services through Hazel Health. The school system should investigate expanding access to these free virtual counseling services to all middle school students and all staff. Additionally, educators need more self-directed planning time.</p> <p>To help prevent burnout and encourage mental wellness, we should also explore creating a voluntary leave bank under which staff may voluntarily contribute unused accrued annual leave for use by another employee who is experiencing a personal or family medical emergency and has exhausted their available accrued leave.</p> <p>When it comes to bullying, our response cannot be generic bromides encouraging civility. Instead, we should NAME IT when it happens. For example, if an LGBTQIA+ student is bullied because of their orientation or identity, the response cannot be telling the bully they need to be nice. They must be led to understand there is nothing wrong with being LGBTQIA+ and that we do not tolerate bigotry against anyone, including LGBTQIA+ students and staff.</p> <p>We must also take our anti-bullying work a step further and create school environments where bullying is less likely to happen because our schools and school system lead by example and celebrate students and staff from often marginalized communities, treating them respectfully.</p>
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QUESTION 2: SCHOOL SAFETY. *The prospect of an active shooter is a serious safety concern. What steps do you recommend to ensure safety for everyone in our schools?*

Karl Frisch	<p>Gun violence prevention has been among my top priorities on the School Board. Over the past three years, I have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sponsored the successful policy closing the gun-ban loophole, extending school gun prohibitions to ALL school division property, including non-instructional facilities like Gatehouse, where the Superintendent, division staff, and the School Board are located.• Co-sponsored the successful proposal to notify parents annually about ways to prevent gun violence and their legal obligation to store their firearms securely. We know most people do not secure their guns, and most school shooters use guns from their homes.• Sponsored changes to our legislative program (the issues we lobby lawmakers on in Richmond and Washington) to include our clear support for gun violence prevention measures <p><i>Continued next page</i></p>
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	<p>that keep our students, families, and staff safe.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported the successful effort to fully fund security vestibule construction at our remaining schools that did not have these more-secure dual entrances that allow for enhanced screening of those entering school buildings. <p>We must also empower educators and law enforcement to respond to potential signs of violence. We should lean into evidence-based crisis intervention programs to recognize and support students in crisis, evidence-based school security upgrades, and trauma-informed emergency planning protocols. Additionally, we must actively address discipline disparities for students of color or with disabilities in this work.</p>
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QUESTION 3: TEACHER SHORTAGE. *We have a growing teacher shortage. How will you address this issue?*

Karl Frisch	<p>First and foremost, I was proud to sponsor our successful collective bargaining resolution, which finally gave teachers and other staff a seat at the decision-making table. This initiative followed my effort three years earlier to sponsor the School Board’s decision to abandon its decades-long opposition to collective bargaining and put the weight of our school system’s lobbyist behind the ultimately successful Virginia General Assembly legislation allowing public employees to pursue these fundamental rights.</p> <p>We must also increase support for our Teachers for Tomorrow program, encouraging our diverse FCPS students to become educators and offering them contracts if they return to our schools to teach when they graduate. Additionally, we need a top-to-bottom reimagining of how we build our talent pipelines and pools for new teachers AND administrators, maximizing efforts to attract teachers from underrepresented and historically marginalized communities.</p> <p>Finally, I am grateful we have increased pay for teachers and other staff over the past two years (with a third on the way). Still, we must get creative to help them put more money in their pockets -- from additional pay increases and better benefits to help with student loan forgiveness and more competitive stipends for extra work. Focusing on pay and workplace climate can change the conversation around teaching and improve hiring and retention.</p>
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QUESTION 4: FACTUAL AND REPRESENTATIVE TEACHING. *Will you explicitly commit FCPS to teach history that is factually accurate, inclusive and age appropriate? How will you work to ensure that literature taught and available in libraries is representative and respects our diverse community of students, staff and families?*

Karl Frisch	<p>I was proud of our School Board’s detailed response to Governor Youngkin’s misguided attacks on Virginia’s history and social science standards of learning. In no uncertain terms, we told the Governor and his Virginia Department of Education that their proposed changes would deny students from receiving history and social science instruction that prioritizes critical thinking, historical accuracy, diverse perspectives, and developmental appropriateness.</p> <p>I will continue championing staff efforts to ensure literature taught and available in school libraries is age-appropriate and representative of our diverse community and that history taught is also age-appropriate, factually accurate, and inclusive. As an aside, I was proud to cosponsor the successful establishment of a joint historical markers contest with the Board of Supervisors to help students discover and elevate local African American history. I will continue looking for creative opportunities to showcase the rich diversity of our community.</p>
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QUESTION 5: BOOK BANNING AND PARENTAL RIGHTS. *The issue of banning books and calls for expanded parental rights have become hot topics in school districts. How would you handle these issues? How does FCPS encourage parents' involvement in their children's education and what, if anything, needs to change?*

Karl Frisch	<p>More than 1,600 books have been banned in public schools nationwide over the past year. I am proud to report our School Board banned ZERO, refusing to back down in the face of often bigoted attacks directed at our educators and librarians. We should handle the availability of reading materials precisely as we currently do: relying on seasoned professional librarians and educators to select age-appropriate, diverse, and inclusive reading materials for students. When someone formally objects to student reading materials, we have a clear process for considering such complaints, which relies on the experience of school administrators and librarians.</p> <p>Too often, public schools are attacked in the name of parental involvement when they simply refuse to kowtow to fringe political ideologies, conspiracy theories, and efforts to undermine public education. The truth is Fairfax County Public Schools and our School Board actively encourage the involvement of all parents and guardians. Rather than catering to the loudest voices, our school system should work harder to hear the perspectives of a statistically significant cross-section of our families. For my part, I will continue appointing diverse parent/guardian voices to Citizen Advisory Committees to help shape the Board's work and bring valuable insight to our deliberations.</p>
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QUESTION 6: ADDRESSING DISPARITY. *Do you endorse the One Fairfax and School Trust policies? How will you lead the School Board in confronting racial and social inequities in all FCPS policies and practices? How will you address the disparity in academic achievement measures and discipline, and improve language access?*

Karl Frisch	<p>Yes, I support the One Fairfax and School Trust policies. To bolster these commitments, I will support creating a robust equity policy that insists on policy and regulatory alignment with our values, funding decisions that advance our equity goals, and dismantling systemic barriers to success for students from historically marginalized communities.</p> <p>I was proud to co-sponsor the School Trust Policy, which protects the personally identifiable information of students and families and prohibits voluntary cooperation with immigration enforcement officials. It was an honor working with families, students, and community stakeholders to advance the policy, which makes clear that our schools are only in the business of educating students and that all families are welcome to take advantage of everything we have to offer as a premier, world-class school system.</p> <p>To meet the needs of English language learners, we must provide additional intensive supports that ensure English language proficiency and, ultimately, mastery. We must also increase investments in translation and interpretation services, more multilingual family liaisons, and efforts to ease transitions and close gaps for students with limited or interrupted formal education. All efforts to close gaps must be measured regularly for success and receive the funding necessary to produce desired results.</p> <p>We also must appreciate that the School Board is not operational in its focus. It is our responsibility to define policies and set expectations for the Superintendent. Part of that work should entail clear metrics of success for the Superintendent around meeting the needs of students facing racial and social inequities and ensuring we provide adequate funding to accomplish the Superintendent's resulting plan. Finally, the School Board must measure success and consider these issues during the Superintendent's annual evaluation.</p>
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QUESTION 7: LGBTQ+ STUDENTS. *What steps, if any, do you believe should be taken to protect and affirm LGBTQ+ students? Current FCPS Regulation 2603 gives students agency on sharing and expressing their gender identity and sexual orientation and does not authorize schools to share this information without their permission. Do you believe this should remain standard practice in FCPS?*

Karl Frisch	<p>As the first out LGBTQIA+ local elected official in Fairfax County and the only out gay man serving on a School Board in Virginia, these issues are personal.</p> <p>I helped write R2603, which provides transgender and gender-expansive students with the most robust protections and supports in Virginia and the region. Furthermore, I authored amendments to our Student Rights and Responsibilities explicitly identifying the rights of transgender and gender-expansive students, including prohibiting malicious deadnaming, misgendering, and outing – a first for any school division in Virginia.</p> <p>When Governor Youngkin announced his illegal attempt to undermine protections for transgender and gender-expansive students, I was a leading voice on the School Board, internally and externally, for our announcement that we would continue enforcing R2603 and would never abandon our LGBTQIA+ students, staff, and families.</p> <p>I will continue fighting to protect and strengthen R2603. If we must defend our regulations or policies in court, I will work to do so aggressively. I will also continue working to put the lobbying weight of our school division behind efforts to advance legislation in Richmond and Washington that protect and affirm the dignity of LGBTQIA+ people.</p> <p>In addition to my work around R2603 and inclusive libraries, I sponsored the successful proposal allowing LGBTQIA+ alumni who change their names to receive new diplomas, sponsored successful changes to Family Life Education to include representation of LGBTQIA+ families, sponsored the school division’s first recognition of Pride Month, and sponsored the successful proposal extending family planning benefits to LGBTQIA+ employees.</p>
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QUESTION 8: SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES. *FCPS is required to provide a free and appropriate public education to students who are identified as needing an IEP or 504 plan. What are your policy goals related to Special Education services? Families of children with disabilities often express frustration with the services and education provided. How will you ensure that every child in FCPS receives an equitable education regardless of their abilities?*

Karl Frisch	<p>No one should be forced to become an amateur paralegal to help their child receive a free and appropriate public education. The school division must collaborate with families and stakeholders to fully implement the American Institutes of Research recommendations resulting from the School Board-commissioned comprehensive audit of special education services.</p> <p>Studies demonstrate inclusive education improves outcomes for all students. Therefore, our school system must vigorously interrogate all practices that serve to exclude students receiving special education services and work to make them fundamentally inclusive. We must also expand explicit instruction and appropriate programming to meet the needs of twice-exceptional students and English learners with disabilities.</p> <p><i>Continued next page</i></p>
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	<p>We also need a more consistent use of Universal Design for Learning for curriculum and programming, explicit and differentiated instruction, and robust partnerships with families and caregivers, especially in local screening, IEP and 504 processes, and transition supports between grade levels and when exiting the school system.</p> <p>Additionally, we must review academic curriculum to make sure it meets the diverse needs of students with disabilities. For example, many parents and guardians believe our Family Life Education curriculum fails students receiving special education services because it is not designed using a neurodiversity lens to increase efficacy.</p> <p>Everything we do must promote a strengths-focused culture of neurodiversity.</p>
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QUESTION 9: SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS. *Do you support the current structure of the School Resource Officer program or would you recommend changes? For example, SROs are now permitted to arrest students for any violation of state and county codes, including low level offenses. Would you support limiting criminal investigations to serious violent actions that are not suitable for resolution through the disciplinary process?*

Karl Frisch	<p>The school division should examine its current Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Fairfax County Police Department to assess if past changes have had the impact initially desired. Additionally, it should undertake every effort to make sure school resource officers (SRO) enhance school safety and security, that SROs have sufficient professional development, and that administrators and SROs clearly understand what SROs do and do not do in our schools.</p> <p>I would also be interested in investigating FCPD’s emerging co-responder model of policing to determine if such a framework could be translated for implementation in our school system. Finally, we should do everything possible to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline. That does not mean ignoring serious or violent offenses but mitigating behavioral issues within our school system wherever possible.</p>
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QUESTION 10: JOINT ENVIRONMENTAL TASK FORCE. *How will you assure that FCPS meets the climate recommendations for facilities and operations in the Joint Environmental Task Force Report, and assure that awareness of the climate crisis is an important part of the curriculum?*

Karl Frisch	<p>First, I was proud to serve as one of two School Board representatives on the Joint Environmental Task Force (JET) and to co-sponsor the Board’s historic approval of the JET’s various recommendations guiding the school division and county to a zero waste and carbon neutral future by 2030 and 2040, respectively.</p> <p>We must avoid our inclination to call the JET’s report “goals” or “recommendations.” The School Board adopted these “recommendations” making them “directives” the Superintendent must carry out. To that end, we need a clearer picture of how we will ultimately achieve these directives. The School Board should direct the Superintendent to develop an operational, strategic plan for meeting the Board’s JET expectations, with an annual report updating the Board on progress. Furthermore, part of the Superintendent’s annual performance evaluation should include an assessment of their implementation of this plan. If the Superintendent needs more money or staff to meet these expectations, various options for funding must be presented to the School Board for consideration.</p> <p>The FCPS curriculum includes ample opportunities to connect to environmental stewardship and the JET directives across grade levels. Unfortunately, it is my understanding that a meaningful focus on climate change does not appear in the science curriculum until fifth grade. I would support reviewing the current science curriculum to introduce age-appropriate information about climate change in earlier grades. The review should also ensure current curriculum instruction aligns with modern best practices and that students are educated about the history of industry-backed misinformation around climate change to help them separate fact from fiction as they encounter climate change news and information outside school.</p>
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QUESTION 11: ALTERNATIVES TO COLLEGE PREP. *College is not a good path for every student upon graduation from high school. Do you support dedicated funding for technical and vocational skills and athletics, as well as programs for music and the arts? What other suggestions do you have to prepare these students for postgraduate life?*

Karl Frisch	<p>We have excellent career and technical education programs in Fairfax County Public Schools, but unfortunately, the availability of these programs is not equitable or consistent from school to school. We must do a better job of making sure the promise of our academy and career programs is available to all students – especially those from historically underrepresented or marginalized communities.</p> <p>In addition to creating new career pathway programs targeting the green economy and other emerging job markets, we should partner with local trade unions to develop additional student apprenticeship opportunities.</p> <p>Finally, our work to educate families and students about these programs must begin in elementary school and continue throughout their time in our school system. We must work to make our career and technical education programs and academies as exciting in the eyes of students as other post-graduation options.</p>
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QUESTION 12: CHARTER SCHOOLS. *Under what circumstances, if any, would you be inclined as a member of the School Board to support a public charter school application presented to the Board? What legislative changes, if any, would you recommend that the General Assembly enact regarding charter schools, laboratory schools or other uses of public funds for private education?*

Karl Frisch	We have world-class public schools in Fairfax County. Instead of redirecting scarce tax dollars to charter schools, laboratory schools, or so-called “school choice” efforts, the Governor and Virginia General Assembly should prioritize fixing school funding formulas that disadvantage Fairfax County Public Schools, costing us millions of dollars every year. We must oppose any use of tax dollars that diminish the authority of local School Boards, lower standards, or replace student-educating motivations with profit-making motivations.
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QUESTION 13: RESTORING CIVILITY. *School Board meetings have become disruptive and lacking in civility. How will you bring civility back?*

Karl Frisch	As I have discussed with several School Board colleagues and candidates in recent weeks, the School Board’s Public Engagement Committee should work with the Office of Safety and Security (OSS) and the Office of Communications and Community Relations (OCCR) to study the way school divisions across the country conduct School Board meetings and public comment to develop a list of best practices and recommendations for bolstering civility and fostering transparency. While there is nothing we can do to change the approach of bad actors (per counsel, we have a limited legal ability to cut public comment speakers off), School Board members must lead by example and set clear expectations for behavior at meetings.
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SPRINGFIELD DISTRICT

Responding Candidate: Sandy Anderson

Did Not Respond: Peter Bixby-Eberhardt, Debra Tisler

QUESTION 1: MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS: *There are several factors that have adversely impacted the mental health of students, teachers and staff in public schools, including bullying, active shooter drills, culture wars and the pandemic. What initiatives will you champion to address mental health needs in the Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) system?*

Sandy Anderson

I currently work as a federal contractor supporting two DoD youth programs, one of which specifically focuses on helping 16–18-year-olds at-risk of not graduating from high school achieve a stronger start in life. Through my work with this nationwide program, I know the mental health impacts prevalent throughout our country are greatly impacting our children. Our contract provides training for the staff working with our teenagers, and we employ counselors to support these students while they are in residence with us. These employees wear many hats that echo our FCPS counselors: academic counselors that help navigate graduation requirements, mental health counselors to support students' emotional wellbeing, and job counselors to help students navigate what happens after graduation. These are just three of the tasks our counselors are facilitating; there are certainly more.

So many of our staff members carry the burden of a multitude of requirements necessary to ensure FCPS is successful, and ultimately, our students are supported when our staff is. Because staff working conditions are our students' learning conditions, we need to do better, particularly in our post-Covid world. As I watch FCPS embrace the new Hazel Health telehealth initiative, I am eager to explore other solutions that would support staff while providing further benefit to our students.

QUESTION 2: SCHOOL SAFETY. *The prospect of an active shooter is a serious safety concern. What steps do you recommend to ensure safety for everyone in our schools?*

Sandy Anderson

School safety is at the forefront of every parent's mind in today's climate. I stand with the 92% of our population (regardless of political affiliation) that believes strongly that we must do something about guns in our country to ensure schools are safe environments for our children. I stand with those demanding action to create safer laws related to guns.

I also stand with those seeking to provide the mental health support to those people that see mass violence as an answer before they have a chance to act on their misguided impulses. I am committed to do everything possible to create policies and provide adequate funding to those programs meant to keep our schools a safe place for our children to learn and grow.

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	Specifically for FCPS buildings, I would like to know more about school safety assessments and steps that have been taken to determine potential problem areas, such as ensuring schools have vestibules in place, to determine specific actions that can be taken within school buildings to immediately keep our kids safe.
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QUESTION 3: TEACHER SHORTAGE. *We have a growing teacher shortage. How will you address this issue?*

Sandy Anderson	<p>We cannot solve the problem of staff leaving teaching without asking them why, and we must look at attrition across all our staff to address this critical need. These conversations cannot wait until exit interviews; we need to have these critical conversations now. Even harder, we must listen to the answers with fresh eyes and enthusiasm for the task ahead.</p> <p>Throughout my campaign, I am committed to engage with teachers and listen to their concerns. None of the solutions to this crisis are likely easy or inexpensive, but if we can find the one that unlocks the answers, the payoff will be worth the investment.</p>
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QUESTION 4: FACTUAL AND REPRESENTATIVE TEACHING. *Will you explicitly commit FCPS to teach history that is factually accurate, inclusive and age appropriate? How will you work to ensure that literature taught and available in libraries is representative and respects our diverse community of students, staff and families?*

Sandy Anderson	<p>As a former college instructor, I have encountered hundreds of students that had vastly different viewpoints than mine. My goal was never to brainwash my students or even change their minds. All I ever encouraged students to do was examine their ideas through research from all sides of a topic. Throughout my education, including as a high school student at Lake Braddock Secondary, I had this approach modeled for me by countless teachers, and this is the approach that must be allowed to persist in our current classrooms.</p> <p>Our staff must retain the ability to help students engage with those hard moments from our past, at age-appropriate times, to help students see why our country's ideals are still worth fighting for. That doesn't come from shamefully hiding the parts of our history that don't align with an idealized view of what our country should be.</p> <p>Books are one more way for students to explore the world through one author's vantage point. As an avid reader that enjoys a plethora of genres, I support access to books of all varieties to meet the needs and interest areas of all our students, both in and out of the classroom. I have been a Review Committee Member for the library at my sons' elementary school for many years, and I believe expanding these programs to have local community members talk about books in question is an amazing approach to ensure the voice of the minority doesn't drown out everyone else.</p>
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QUESTION 5: BOOK BANNING AND PARENTAL RIGHTS. *The issue of banning books and calls for expanded parental rights have become hot topics in school districts. How would you handle these issues? How does FCPS encourage parents' involvement in their children's education and what, if anything, needs to change?*

Sandy Anderson	<p>I have been on the Parent Teacher Organization Board at my sons' elementary school for the last seven years, the last five as president. I strongly believe parent involvement in education is essential to student success; however, engagement does not equate to control. We need to let teachers teach. We need to trust in the expertise of these trained professionals, and those that disagree with an aspect of the curriculum should continue to be able to opt out their children.</p> <p>However, the call for expanded parental rights comes from a place of fear, and "mad" is easier than all other emotions. That is usually a clue for me to lean in. As a member of the School Board, I am committed to listen to all constituents in my district and provide as much clarity to the choices being made by FCPS as possible.</p>
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QUESTION 6: ADDRESSING DISPARITY. *Do you endorse the One Fairfax and School Trust policies? How will you lead the School Board in confronting racial and social inequities in all FCPS policies and practices? How will you address the disparity in academic achievement measures and discipline, and improve language access?*

Sandy Anderson	<p>The essence behind the 2017 One Fairfax policy is that "we all do better, when we all do better," a sentiment that is absolutely applicable for our schools. While the process implemented by the One Fairfax policy is not linear, work has been done regarding creating a shared language of analysis and definitions amongst key stakeholders and leaders throughout the county in the years since. That has been evident in language schools are using while communicating with parents, like me, which shows the internal infrastructure we are working toward in FCPS is happening.</p> <p>This framework is not a process that will necessarily have a definitive end. In order to see the growth we are looking for, we need to keep using the skills we have acquired to eliminate unequitable practices throughout our division, and we need to ensure that our measures of success are not the same for every student. In that regard, we have good work left to do.</p>
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QUESTION 7: LGBTQ+ STUDENTS. *What steps, if any, do you believe should be taken to protect and affirm LGBTQ+ students? Current FCPS Regulation 2603 gives students agency on sharing and expressing their gender identity and sexual orientation and does not authorize schools to share this information without their permission. Do you believe this should remain standard practice in FCPS?*

Sandy Anderson	<p>As a college instructor for 14 years, I had a clear vantage point of watching students learn and examine who they were going to be, particularly when those decisions put themselves at odds with their parents' beliefs. This is an uncomfortable position for parents to be in if they don't understand that this is an important part of their children's development.</p> <p>R2603 gives students the space in our schools to safely navigate these issues in a non-stigmatizing environment. I believe that as long as there is no threat of harm, we should defend this space for students. Obviously, it would be ideal if students could work through these moments with the support of their families; however, that is not always possible at first.</p> <p>You do not have to do much research to understand that R2603 is going to continue to be under attack by our current Governor, who has misunderstood parent involvement in our schools with proposed parental control of our school system. It seems he is only proposing parental control for parents that agree with his approach to education. Therefore, again, our School Board and Superintendent will have to work together to ensure that we can help protect schools to be safe places for students to examine who they are, intellectually and personally.</p> <p>Our nation's renewed focus on transgender issues should not impact something that has been working for Fairfax County. I see no need to reintroduce segregation into any aspect of our schools and would oppose repeal or undermining of this regulation in whatever form it takes.</p>
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QUESTION 8: SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES. *FCPS is required to provide a free and appropriate public education to students who are identified as needing an IEP or 504 plan. What are your policy goals related to Special Education services? Families of children with disabilities often express frustration with the services and education provided. How will you ensure that every child in FCPS receives an equitable education regardless of their abilities?*

Sandy Anderson	<p>My children do not receive Special Education services; therefore, this is an area I am actively pursuing more information about. I hope to engage with those advocates within FCPS to ensure that I best understand the scope of the problem and the desires of the families involved.</p> <p>My preliminary investigations related to frustration with the services and education to these families reveal issues such as the need for IEP reciprocity for military families moving into our area to ensure students receive the services they need as quickly as possible, equity within services available from school to school, and anything FCPS can do to streamline, simplify, and add clarity to the process. I would love to know if there are school systems across the country that are doing better than we are and what we can do to get to where they are.</p>
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QUESTION 9: SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS. *Do you support the current structure of the School Resource Officer program or would you recommend changes? For example, SROs are now permitted to arrest students for any violation of state and county codes, including low level offenses. Would you support limiting criminal investigations to serious violent actions that are not suitable for resolution through the disciplinary process?*

Sandy Anderson	<p>In our current climate related to the mental health of our students, our goal should be to provide as many trusted adults as possible in our schools that our students know they can depend on. The SRO should absolutely be one of those people, which is hard to maintain if they can arrest students, particularly for lower-level offenses. Our SROs should continue their important roles of facilitating interactions between these two Fairfax County agencies: FCPS and FCPD. SROs should hold and transfer students to FCPD when needed, they should be honest with students about their role within the schools, and they should work to gain the trust of the students in their schools.</p>
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QUESTION 10: JOINT ENVIRONMENTAL TASK FORCE. *How will you assure that FCPS meets the climate recommendations for facilities and operations in the Joint Environmental Task Force Report, and assure that awareness of the climate crisis is an important part of the curriculum?*

Sandy Anderson	<p>I would ensure that the Fairfax County School Board and the FCPS Superintendent continued an open dialogue about the status of JET directives and addressed shortcomings. Communication about barriers to success is one way to keep everyone aligned. The School Board should also address how the Superintendent will be held accountable to focus on the JET goals.</p> <p>I am eager to learn more about the current plan to implement the JET objectives particularly regarding the equity component. All too often, these types of initiatives are successful in their inception without hope of bringing them to fruition, particularly in light of current staff turnover. A result that is truly unacceptable when the topic is this significant to our shared future.</p> <p>In a county as large as Fairfax, it is reassuring as a citizen to see these two major initiatives, JET and One Fairfax, overlap. This is the type of collaboration between our governing bodies intended by the One Fairfax policy, and the equity lens included in the JET goals illustrates a commitment toward action. As decisions are made about how to work toward achieving the JET goals, the One Fairfax Lens of equity should be at the forefront. Title I and highly diverse schools should continue to be assessed for viability related to pilot programs and initial applications of sustainable practices.</p>
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QUESTION 11: ALTERNATIVES TO COLLEGE PREP. *College is not a good path for every student upon graduation from high school. Do you support dedicated funding for technical and vocational skills and athletics, as well as programs for music and the arts? What other suggestions do you have to prepare these students for postgraduate life?*

Sandy Anderson	<p>As a college instructor that saw these students in every classroom I ever taught in, I agree completely that college is not an appropriate path for every student, particularly directly out of high school. Other technical and vocational options are vital for those students seeking successful careers.</p> <p>There are amazing organizations throughout the country helping with this work to rebuild skilled workers in a variety of job fields. FCPS does not have to be the sole solution to this problem for our students; however, we must ensure that the ambassadors of this information are readily available for students and their families. In a division as large as ours, it is easy for information about opportunities to get lost, and we must work to ensure the equitable distribution of this information.</p>
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QUESTION 12: CHARTER SCHOOLS. *Under what circumstances, if any, would you be inclined as a member of the School Board to support a public charter school application presented to the Board? What legislative changes, if any, would you recommend that the General Assembly enact regarding charter schools, laboratory schools or other uses of public funds for private education?*

Sandy Anderson	<p>Adequate funding impacts everything from staff retention to the availability of the special programs that make our schools desired throughout the country. Public dollars must stay with public schools, and the state should provide an adequate source of funding for all the counties throughout the commonwealth. As funding from the state is called into question, the Fairfax County School Board needs to be ready to justify and maximize our public tax dollars for public education, and I stand ready to take on this important task.</p>
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QUESTION 13: RESTORING CIVILITY. *School Board meetings have become disruptive and lacking in civility. How will you bring civility back?*

Sandy Anderson	<p>The only person that I can control related to civility is myself. I will absolutely make a commitment to conduct myself in a professional, collegial manner. I also make a personal commitment to fight for open communication focused on clarity, not just transparency. With so many voices in Fairfax County, we may not always agree, and there are likely going to be unintended consequences of decisions that will have some members of our community feeling upset. I would rather those people focus their discontent on the Board than attack our students or staff.</p> <p>I will be one of 12 members of the Fairfax County School Board. None of us will be able to focus on specific priorities without a commitment to collaborate with each other. Therefore, fostering that alignment and cohesion amongst my colleagues is going to be one of my top priorities. The issues we face together are too important for us to be divided into inaction.</p>
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SULLY DISTRICT

Responding Candidate: Seema Dixit

Did Not Respond: Cynthia Walsh

QUESTION 1: MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS: *There are several factors that have adversely impacted the mental health of students, teachers and staff in public schools, including bullying, active shooter drills, culture wars and the pandemic. What initiatives will you champion to address mental health needs in the Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) system?*

Seema Dixit	<p>It is true that mental health of our students needs immediate attention. FCPS will need additional psychologists, school counselors, and social workers. These professionals can provide support and interventions to students who are struggling with mental health issues.</p> <p>We need to foster a supportive school environment that promotes positive mental health. This can be done by implementing anti-bullying policies, promoting positive social interactions, and providing opportunities for students to participate in extracurricular activities.</p>
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QUESTION 2: SCHOOL SAFETY. *The prospect of an active shooter is a serious safety concern. What steps do you recommend to ensure safety for everyone in our schools?*

Seema Dixit	<p>As a parent, the prospect of active shooter at school is my worst nightmare, I know FCPS has active shooter drills and plans in place but when there is an actual shooter on premise, most plans fail. Prevention is better than cure. As one of the largest public school systems in the nation, we need to have a firm plan not to let this happen in the first place and be a role model to other school districts in the state and the nation.</p> <p>While adding more police officials at school is not a practical solution, we can use the technology to our advantage. There are many products in the market which will detect a pocketknife or a gun or bomb without a physical pat down. They are better than normal metal detectors and a number of students can pass them without disrupting the flow of traffic. They can be placed outside the school main doors and other doors and a centralized monitoring location with staff member can initiate an immediate lockdown and alert the principal/police officer at school in case of active shooter trying to enter the premise.</p>
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QUESTION 3: TEACHER SHORTAGE. *We have a growing teacher shortage. How will you address this issue?*

Seema Dixit	<p>In my conversations with teachers, they expressed frustration with the excess administrative work they have to do, which takes time away from instruction. Establishing a positive work culture that fosters a sense of belonging can help retain staff. This can be achieved by creating a supportive work environment, providing opportunities for professional growth and development, and recognizing the contributions of employees.</p> <p>The current School Board has approved the collective bargaining agreement for FCPS teachers and staff, which is a step in the right direction. We need to listen to our teachers: they change lives and build the future generation. Many young teachers who are in this profession because of their passion have advanced master's degrees. We need these teachers to stay with FCPS.</p> <p>Our teachers are paid less than in surrounding school divisions and in comparison, to other professions with the same educational requirements. I will work to advocate for better pay. Also, FCPS has an ongoing special ed and substitute teacher shortage and there are very qualified parents in Fairfax County who are now stepping up to offer their services to the school system, including many of my friends. Many retired teachers are coming back to serve as substitute teachers. They are an excellent way to increase the teacher pipeline into FCPS and attract and retain long term substitutes by better compensation and recognition.</p>
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QUESTION 4: FACTUAL AND REPRESENTATIVE TEACHING. *Will you explicitly commit FCPS to teach history that is factually accurate, inclusive and age appropriate? How will you work to ensure that literature taught and available in libraries is representative and respects our diverse community of students, staff and families?*

Seema Dixit	<p>When teaching history, it's important to use reliable sources such as textbooks, academic journals, and primary sources that provide a well-rounded view of the topic.</p> <p>History is not just about one particular group or culture. It's important to include diverse perspectives and viewpoints to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic. It highlights historical significance by emphasizing the significance of the events being taught and how they relate to current events and the world today. It encourages students to think critically about what they are learning, to question assumptions, and to consider alternative viewpoints. The language and content should be age-appropriate, so students can comprehend the material and relate it to their own lives.</p> <p>I will work to ensure that literature taught and available in school library represents all of us. As a woman of color and an immigrant, I strongly believe in protective our civil rights and right to full and wholesome education for our children.</p>
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QUESTION 5: BOOK BANNING AND PARENTAL RIGHTS. *The issue of banning books and calls for expanded parental rights have become hot topics in school districts. How would you handle these issues? How does FCPS encourage parents' involvement in their children's education and what, if anything, needs to change?*

Seema Dixit	<p>The issue of banning books is a form of censorship that can have a chilling effect on free expression and limit access to information and diverse perspectives. We cannot let this happen in FCPS or elsewhere. It violates the freedom of speech and the right to access information.</p> <p>Parents should have the ability to opt their children out of certain classes if they are against their religious or personal beliefs, etc. but calls to ban the books for everyone can lead to a narrow-minded and overly restrictive approach to learning. As a public school system, we need to ensure that children receive a well-rounded education that exposes them to a broad range of ideas and perspectives and FCPS will definitely doing that.</p> <p>FCPS recognizes the important role that parents play in their children's education and provides a variety of ways to encourage parental involvement like volunteering at the schools, getting involved in PTA/PTSA, Family Engagement Centers, and Parents advisory committees.</p>
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QUESTION 6: ADDRESSING DISPARITY. *Do you endorse the One Fairfax and School Trust policies? How will you lead the School Board in confronting racial and social inequities in all FCPS policies and practices? How will you address the disparity in academic achievement measures and discipline, and improve language access?*

Seema Dixit	<p>Yes, I endorse the One Fairfax and School Trust policies. FCPS a safe, welcoming, and inclusive space to all students and their families. As an immigrant and woman of color, I will personally see to it that we are doing our best to confront the racial and social inequities in FCPS policies.</p> <p>To address the disparity in academic achievement, we need to implement evidence-based interventions, such as targeted tutoring, mentoring, and counseling, which can help improve academic achievement and reduce disciplinary issues. For ELL Learners, providing language support, such as bilingual instruction and translation services, can help them access the curriculum and succeed in school. Providing students with access to resources, such as technology, books, and extracurricular activities, can help level the playing field and improve academic achievement.</p>
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QUESTION 7: LGBTQ+ STUDENTS. *What steps, if any, do you believe should be taken to protect and affirm LGBTQ+ students? Current FCPS Regulation 2603 gives students agency on sharing and expressing their gender identity and sexual orientation and does not authorize schools to share this information without their permission. Do you believe this should remain standard practice in FCPS?*

Seema Dixit	<p>As a strong supporter of the LGBTQIA+ community, I will definitely defend the regulation 2603 which established procedures and guidelines for schools to ensure that all students, including gender-expansive and transgender students experience a safe, supportive, and inclusive school environment. I will support for it to remain standard practice in FCPS.</p> <p>There is a lot of misinformation and misrepresentation about this regulation; while those who are willing to educate themselves are able to understand the reasons R2603 was put in place, many continue to feed false information to divide the community and instill fear in the minds of parents.</p>
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QUESTION 8: SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES. *FCPS is required to provide a free and appropriate public education to students who are identified as needing an IEP or 504 plan. What are your policy goals related to Special Education services? Families of children with disabilities often express frustration with the services and education provided. How will you ensure that every child in FCPS receives an equitable education regardless of their abilities?*

Seema Dixit	<p>The students with disabilities need more support as there is still a huge gap in their learning and support system. I have a twice exceptional son with diagnosed ADHD and Anxiety, and he struggled through high school and he did not get the support he needed; despite having an IEP at his high school, his teachers routinely forgot to remind him to turn in his homework, etc. which was the critical issue with him and the first point in his IEP. He told me many times that the IEP did not help him at all. We need to work closely with the students, teachers and parents to ensure there is a proper plan for them with regular check-ins. We need more special-ed teachers as there is increased need and lack of staff. FCPS needs to focus on hiring the right staff to support the learning needs of special needs students.</p>
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QUESTION 9: SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS. *Do you support the current structure of the School Resource Officer program or would you recommend changes? For example, SROs are now permitted to arrest students for any violation of state and county codes, including low level offenses. Would you support limiting criminal investigations to serious violent actions that are not suitable for resolution through the disciplinary process?*

Seema Dixit	<p>I do not support that SROs are now permitted to arrest students including for low level offenses; it will result in the over-criminalization of minor offenses that might be better addressed through other means, such as counseling or restorative justice programs. It's important to recognize that arrests can have long-lasting consequences for students, potentially impacting their educational and employment opportunities in the future. Therefore, it's important to ensure that any policies related to SROs and student arrests are carefully considered and balanced with the best interests of students in mind.</p>
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QUESTION 10: JOINT ENVIRONMENTAL TASK FORCE. *How will you assure that FCPS meets the climate recommendations for facilities and operations in the Joint Environmental Task Force Report, and assure that awareness of the climate crisis is an important part of the curriculum?*

Seema Dixit	<p>As a strong advocate of achieving Net Zero Carbon Pollution, I will fully support efforts to direct the Superintendent to develop SMART Goals for FCPS School Board's JET directives. It should be part of FCPS Superintendent's annual performance evaluation. We need to hold the leaders accountable to implement the plans. There are many other things that can be done at local school levels, we need to put our effort for zero waste and biodegradable alternatives. I'm excited to read this article, it's a step in the right direction and hopefully we will be fully electric in the next decade. https://electricschoolbusinitiative.org/electric-school-bus-series-electrifying-partnership-fairfax-county-virginia.</p> <p>I would love to work with schools to reduce their carbon footprint on the local level and remove single use plastic from schools. We need to teach students about Reduce, Reuse, Recycle so they grow up to be responsible citizens in the future, zero waste and carbon neutrality and climate crisis should be part of their curriculum.</p>
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QUESTION 11: ALTERNATIVES TO COLLEGE PREP. *College is not a good path for every student upon graduation from high school. Do you support dedicated funding for technical and vocational skills and athletics, as well as programs for music and the arts? What other suggestions do you have to prepare these students for postgraduate life?*

Seema Dixit	<p>It is true that college is not necessarily the best path for every student after high school. Many students prefer to pursue vocational or technical skills training or other career options. Some students may also be interested in athletics or other extracurricular activities that can help them develop skills and pursue their passions like music and arts.</p> <p>We need to provide students with valuable training and skills that are directly applicable to their chosen careers and can help prepare them for success in the workforce.</p> <p>It is important to ensure that all students have access to a range of educational options that will help them achieve their goals and prepare them for success after high school. This will need dedicated funding and support for vocational and technical education, athletics, and other non-college-focused areas.</p>
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QUESTION 12: CHARTER SCHOOLS. *Under what circumstances, if any, would you be inclined as a member of the School Board to support a public charter school application presented to the Board? What legislative changes, if any, would you recommend that the General Assembly enact regarding charter schools, laboratory schools or other uses of public funds for private education?*

Seema Dixit	<p>The public charter schools can divert resources away from traditional public schools, leading to funding and enrollment issues; may be less accountable and transparent than traditional public schools; and may be prone to cherry-picking high-performing students while leaving behind more vulnerable or struggling students. The key is to ensure that all students have access to a high-quality education in traditional public schools and it is very much possible with the right budgeting, resource allocation and variety in the curriculum.</p>
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QUESTION 13: RESTORING CIVILITY. *School Board meetings have become disruptive and lacking in civility. How will you bring civility back?*

Seema Dixit	<p>Bringing civility back to School Board meetings will require a concerted effort from all participants, including Board members, community members, and school officials. It will take time and effort, but with a commitment to respectful dialogue and constructive problem-solving, it is possible to create a more civil and productive environment for all involved.</p> <p>We are human first, we teach kindness to our children, we have to practice what we preach. Public servants can be held accountable, but people should not attack them personally which has been happening inside and outside the School Board meetings.</p>
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