

Common Questionnaire for candidates in Howard County Board of Education Election 2020

Background

This is a common questionnaire (CommonQ) that is being proposed to Howard County endorsement entities to use to reduce the time candidates have to spend completing endorsement work. This is not indicative of any type of coalition of participating entities, as it is solely an administrative endeavor to assist candidates. Each entity that ends up participating in the use of this common questionnaire (CommonQ) could possibly publicize the answers. Each entity will contact candidates separately regarding their own supplemental questionnaires and due dates. **CURRENT COMMONQ due date is Saturday, Feb. 15th.**

Requests to participate in the CommonQ were sent to Howard County endorsement entities. The following entities are currently participating.

- Chinese American Political Association PAC (POC Hongling Zhou)
- Howard County Families for Education Improvement (POC Vipin Sahijwani)
- Howard County Neighbors United (POC Steve Keller)
- Indian Origin Network of Howard County (IONHoCo) (POC Pravin Ponnuri)
- Scott E's Blog (POC Scott Ewart)
- The People's Voice Ethics Ballot (POC Lisa Markovitz)
- HoCo Kids (POC Jen Nussbaum)

Instructions

Attached is the current CommonQ. Please restrict your answers to the length of the forms provided. You can add supplemental information at the end if you feel it is necessary.

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Individual Information

Name/District	Matthew Levine, District 4
Campaign Address/Phone/Email	Enter your campaign address, phone number, and email address.
Social Media Accounts	Facebook.com/voteMatt4HoCo
Education History	BS UMBC
Languages Spoken/Other Skills/Relevant Experience	Mangement for the last 15+ years.

Community Interest / Position Questions

1. Why are you running? (1,200 characters)

I am running for the BOE because I want to ensure that all students succeed and that our school system is responsibly managed. Each student has different needs, from children with special needs, to academically advanced students, to students who did not begin their education in the Howard County Public School System. We need to identify the needs of each student and provide the necessary resources so that each student is able to reach their full potential. We also have a responsibility to taxpayers to ensure the efficient use of tax dollars to fund our schools. We must evaluate the budget, determine needs versus wants, and put money back in the classrooms where it is most needed to support learning.

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2. Explain why you are qualified to hold this position. (1,200 characters)

I have attended public schools in Maryland my entire life. As a person with learning disabilities and a parent of a child with a disability, I have extensive experience working with the special education system. I know the struggles that parents face every day trying to get the support that their children need to succeed. As a Small business owner I have worked on large budgets and managed both small and large groups. I have also been on the RiverHill Village Board for the last 2 years, working on the village development committee, and the community outreach committee.

3. Have you ever testified before County or State Boards or done public volunteer work? (1,200 characters)

I testified this past fall before the Howard County Council in opposition of CR 112-2019, the resolution to desegregate schools. I also testified before the Board of Education opposing the Superintendent's redistricting proposal.

As for volunteer work, I volunteer each summer at a local Jewish day camp and set up a water park for the children to enjoy. This is an inclusive camp that draws children from all parts of Howard County, including children with disabilities. For the past two years, I have served on the Board of Directors for the River Hill Community Association. In this role, I have led the development committee, to ensure smart development happened in and around our village. I also worked on the community outreach committee planning and sponsoring different neighborhood events.

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4. With regard to school redistricting, what do you believe are the three top priorities, in order, that should be considered as reasons to redistrict, or goals of redistricting? How would you suggest those goals be met? (1,500 characters)

My top three priorities with regard to redistricting are to redistrict when a new school opens (or if a school is renovated to add significant capacity), ensure students attend neighborhood schools, and work to identify a true feeder system to eliminate extremely small feeds. These goals can be met by encouraging the county to build necessary infrastructure and eliminating the bussing of students to schools far away (sometimes the 4th closet school or even farther).

5. Do you believe that residents should be able to rely on students attending their neighborhood schools? Why or why not? (1,500 characters)

Yes, residents should absolutely be able to rely on students attending their neighborhood schools. In some instances, this may not mean the absolute closest school, but parents should be able to expect and rely on their children attending a neighborhood school. People choose to live where they do for a variety of reasons and their children should attend school where they live. There is no logical reason to bus children outside of their neighborhood to attend far away schools that they have no connection to. As the saying goes, it takes a village to raise a child. Children are better served when they stay in their community where they have the supports that they need.

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6. How do you feel the HCPSS should deal with overcapacity school issues? (1,200 characters)

Since the Board of Education does not have a say in when or where new development is approved, the Board must advocate to the County Council for the necessary funding to build new and expand and renovate existing schools. One thing I will not do when on the BOE is push out long time established neighborhoods, so that developers can move in new homes.

7. Do you believe developers should contribute more to fund schools? Do you believe developers should have to wait longer to build in overcapacity areas? How do you suggest the County Council and Board of Education work together to address overcapacity issues? (1,500 characters)

Yes, the County Council should require developers to pay a school surcharge fee that is on par with surrounding counties. CB 42-2019 which was passed this past fall did not go far enough to increase the school surcharge fee and included too many loopholes for developers. Developers should also have to wait longer to build in areas where schools are already at capacity. Proposed CB 1-2020 which would increase the AFPO wait time from 4 to 7 years does not do enough to stop development when schools are at capacity. Howard County should follow the lead of other jurisdictions that completely close development in areas where the schools are at capacity until new schools are built. The County Council and Board of Education should work together to find a way to add capacity before any development is approved, we need to plan ahead vs playing catchup.

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8. What does equitable provision of education by the HCPSS, mean to you? How do you suggest that be implemented? (1,500 characters)

As noted by HCPSS, "Equity is providing the access, opportunities and supports needed to help students, families and staff reach their full potential by removing barriers to success that individuals face. It does not mean equal or giving everyone the same thing." To me, this means that we treat each student as an individual, determine what that individual's needs are, and then provide the supports that are needed by the individual to be successful. This cannot be achieved simply by bussing children around and evening out test scores on paper. We must dig deeper, identify needs, and provide individualized support.

9. What do you believe Board of Education Members can do to achieve the highest level of achievement for all? Please include in your answer what you believe should be done to close any achievement gaps, be specific. Please also include in your answer, applicable related positions on homework and GT programs. (1,500 characters)

In order to achieve the highest level of achievement for all students, we must treat each student as an individual. That means we determine what a particular child's needs are and then provide individualized support to that student. Not just to some students, but to ALL students. Howard County is notorious for not supporting special education children. We must stop fighting parents who are seeking help for their children and provide testing and support as required by the law. We must also support our academically advanced students by providing GT programs to ensure that those students also reach their potential. For students with achievement gaps, we must identify root causes of the achievement gap and then provide the necessary supports.

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10. Do you believe the Board of Education race should remain non-partisan on the ballot? If so, how is your campaign remaining non-partisan? (1,200 characters)

I believe that the Board of Education race should remain non-partisan on the ballot. Politics do not have a place in our children's education. My campaign is remaining non-partisan by refusing to take campaign contributions from special interest groups such as developers. I will not be swayed by political or other special interests groups. I have no aspirations to run for a partisan political office in the future. I am doing this for the kids.

11. If elected, what are the top three goals you would want to work upon in your first year in office? (1,200 characters)

My top three goals are improving the special education program, taking a close look at the budget to evaluate how we are spending taxpayer money, and restoring public trust in Board of Education leadership and decisions.

For too long HCPSS has treated our SPED students as second class, that needs to stop, HCPSS not only is failing our current SPED students, they fight families anytime they try to get their kids tested for learning disabilities. I will make sure all kids that should have an IEP get one, I will make sure we fully support all our teachers especially our special education teachers.

I do feel we have a budget issue in HCPSS, however I do not think the current BOE is using our tax money wisely. We must look at what the money is spent on and cut the bloat, I would start with the central office and cut most of our transportation admins. We need to look at cuts to places that do not directly affect our students before we ever consider cuts to teachers.

The disaster this fall with redistricting, with the back-room deals, and bullying etc. our current BOE is not trusted, not open and honest.

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12. Do you believe the Superintendent's requested budget is too high, too low or just right? If too low, how much should it be, and what other county budget items should be cut to fund it? If too high what should be cut from the request? (1,200 characters)

I believe that the Superintendent's requested budget was too high. The BOE needs to ensure that we are being responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars. Taxes are already very high in Howard County compared to neighboring jurisdictions, so raising taxes is not the only or best answer to funding schools. The BOE must take a close look at the entire school system budget and evaluate how we are spending our money. We must ensure accountability by evaluating existing programs to determine if they are meeting their stated goals. We should not be spending money on ineffective programs. Every new or existing programs must have a stated goal along with a scoring method to prove its effective. If we are not getting results, we should not continue to spend money on a program.

We must also split all none HCPSS programs from the HCPSS budget, one example of this is the private school busing. If the county wants to fund this it should not be under the BOE. We need to be transparent on what is the BOE responsibility and what is not!!!

13. What is your position on each of the current local Howard County State bills?(1,500 characters)

I am 100% against the state bills!!! Why, simple they were written to push a political agenda. I am all for our state government working with the local government, however when a bill is written to force the hands of our local BOE, it must be stopped. HB1511, would force our BOE to redistrict yearly, this would be extremely harmful to our kids. HB1521, distorts the reason the community was against the redistricting this past fall, home owners are well aware they could be redistricted from their school. However homeowners would not expect to be moved to the 4th,5th,6th, etc. closets school.

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14. Do you feel class sizes are too high or too low? Why? (1,200 characters)

I believe class sizes are already too high and increasing class sizes is not the answer to making the budget work. For example, my daughter's third grade class has 28 students (need to verify). The classroom was not designed to hold this many students and is so crammed full of desks that the students can barely move around. Last year my son's kindergarten class had 25 children. That is just way too many children at that age to have in one classroom. It makes effective instruction impossible. Teachers are not able to teach with this many students in one class. My daughter's kindergarten class a few years ago had under 20 children and it was a world of difference compared to my son's class.

15. How should performance be measured, of students, of teachers? (1,200 characters)

For students, performance should not be measured by multiple standardized tests. We spend way too much time and money on standardized testing and this has zero benefit for the students. We do need to do some benchmarking, such as reading scales, to ensure that children are progressing and making expected progress, but we do not have a need for days of endless testing. Teacher performance should be measured by the success of the students. If a student is failing to succeed, then the teacher is also failing to identify the root cause of the problem.

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16. What do you believe should be done to attempt to improve physical safety in schools?
(1,200 characters)

One way to improve physical safety in schools is by ensure that our schools are not overcrowded. Our schools are built with an intended optimal capacity. Once we start adding portables to schools, we are overburdening the footprint of the school because although we can add classroom space, the size of all of the common areas such as the cafeteria and gym remain the same. This leads to crowded hallways, children venturing outside to portables, and the inability for parents to attend special events such as class parties. We also need to look at how we can secure our schools in the event of an incident, especilly as we build new schools. HCPSS should be looking at using technology to protect our students. One thing I do not agree with is doing full active shooter drills with the kids. We should be doing lock down drills as they should be no more stressful then firedrills.

17. How would you as a Board Member oversee your only employee and review and instruct the Superintendent? Are you pleased with the current Superintendent? Would you vote to renew his contract? Why or why not? (1,200 characters)

As a Board Member, I would set clear goals for the Superintendent and meet frequently to evaluate progress to meet those goals. I am not pleased with the current Superintendent. He has not provided the necessary leadership to protect the integrity of our schools. He has not managed the school budget appropriately and has increased central office costs and staffing while constantly cutting from instruction. Under his leadership, a huge health fund deficit was not addressed, special educaiton teachers filed a union grievance and testified that they are at a breaking point, schools have not provided special education services as required by law, and the BOE was sued for violating the Open Meetings Act and approving an illegal redistricting plan.

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18. Do you believe the HCPSS is serving the needs of the Special Education community? If not, what needs to be changed? (1,200 characters)

No, HCPSS is not serving the needs of the special education community. Each day I hear personal, heartwrenching stories from HCPSS families who are fighting to receive the special education services that their children are entitled to receive under Federal law. HCPSS is jeopardizing our reputation of providing a world class education and opening up the school system to multiple lawsuits. Instead of fighting parents, we need to be supporting our most vulnerable students. Parents should not have to pay thousands of dollars for private testing and advocates just to receive services that they are legally entitled to. Everyone wants to talk about equity, but where is the equity for our special education children? I also suspect that part of the achievement gap problem in some schools is due to undiagnosed learning disabilities and our lack of support for special education.

Currently administered by Lisa Markovitz. By Authority, The People's Voice, Lisa Markovitz Treasurer