

## ETHICS BALLOT QUESTIONNAIRE

### Howard County Board of Education Primary 2022

Congratulations on your decision to run for the Howard County Board of Education. The People's Voice is a civic/political organization in Howard and Montgomery Counties. We have over 4,000 members in Howard County and sponsor the non-partisan Ethics Ballot. If you would like to seek endorsement please return this Questionnaire to [EthicsBallot@Gmail.com](mailto:EthicsBallot@Gmail.com) by midnight May 24, 2022. Please note that all questionnaires are published on the website, [www.EthicsBallot.com](http://www.EthicsBallot.com). We will be in touch regarding endorsement dates soon after getting the questionnaires back. We pride ourselves in working hard for our endorsed candidates, and look forward to hearing your positions on important County issues. THANK YOU so very much for your time!

### **Be sure to address all aspects of each question.**

Name/District: Linfeng Chen

Campaign Address/Phone/Email:

PO Box 1608, Laurel, MD 20725 / 434-604-0281 / [chen4boe@gmail.com](mailto:chen4boe@gmail.com)

Educational History:

PhD in Applied Mechanics from University of Virginia

Languages Spoken/Other Skills/Relevant Experience:

English/Chinese

BOE Operating Budget Review Committee (OBRC), Member

HCPSS Science Advisory Committee, Member

HCPSS Social Studies Advisory Committee, Member

HCPSS School Calendar Committee, Member

Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, and Girl Scouts, Various Leadership Roles (Den Leader, Assistant Den Leader, Committee Member)

Science Station Manager at Linstead Day Camp

Treasurer for United Blue Travel Soccer Team in SAC

Member of Board of Directors of Howard County Chinese School

Former Vice President of CAPA-HC

Project Leader of Chesapeake Bay Trust Grant

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1. Why are you running for this office? Describe how your campaign is viable.

I am running for the Board of Education because I want to solve the pressing problems in our school system. I have observed many issues in HCPSS as my eldest child grew from a kindergartener to a 10th grader. Covid made some issues even worse. Some of the most pressing issues include the drop in academic performance, the staff shortage, overcrowded schools, the mental health crisis, school safety, dropped school enrollment, lagged school infrastructure, lack of long term planning, and school start times.

If I am elected, I will focus on addressing these issues and challenging HCPSS to come up with solutions to cultivate the best academic performance possible, repair the damage caused by Covid, retain current teachers while recruiting new teachers, increase permanent classrooms, define long term priorities, maintain a safe learning environment, adjust high school start times, and take concrete steps to address the mental health crisis among our students.

My leadership / community service experience and strong community support make my campaign viable. I have leadership experience in multiple non-profit organizations (e.g., Member of Board of Directors of Howard County Chinese School, former Vice President and Founding Board Member of Howard County Chinese American Parent Association) and extensive volunteer experiences in PTAs, HCPSS Committees, Scouts, sports teams, and AAPI communities. I also have a strong campaign team working with me. We started early and remain strong. Numerous large, medium, and small signs are spreading across the County due to my volunteers' hard work and over one hundred volunteers help me to drop literature. I have also organized multiple meet and greet events as well as visited many PTA meetings. Additionally, I have strong financial support from community members across the County. I am the only candidate who received over \$22,000 from nearly 200 donations from individual community members. I am very proud of our teamwork and community support!

2. What qualifications do you uniquely bring to hold this office? What experience do you have with the Howard County Board of Education (committees/PTA,etc.)? Have you ever testified? What positions did you take?

I am uniquely qualified to be a school board member for numerous reasons. First, I have lived in Howard County for 11 years, establishing roots and getting to know the County and its people well. Second, I have three children in the school system covering elementary school, middle school, and high school. This has provided me with a comprehensive understanding of all three levels and current issues at each level. Third, I have a PhD in engineering, which leads me to always try to find an optimal and cost effective solution to address any issue based on data analysis and scientific evidence. Fourth, I have strong leadership experience within HCPSS. As previously mentioned, I currently serve on the Board of Education Operating Budget

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Review Committee and have previously served on the HCPSS Science Advisory Committee, Social Study Advisory Committee, and School Calendar Committee. All of these experiences have given me great insights into HCPSS and make me uniquely qualified for the position. I testified many times in front of the Board of Education, including supporting inclusive school calendars reflecting our cultural diversity, supporting the world language program with a wider variety of language offerings, and advocating to include Asian American studies in the school curriculum. Lastly, I am very open minded and can work with diverse groups, seek common ground, and make compromised solutions on complicated issues when necessary.

3. Have you signed the No Dark Money, No Developer Money pledge? If NOT how do you eliminate the appearance of conflicts?

Yes, I am very proud to make No Developer Money pledge. Developer money has contributed to HCPSS school overcrowding.

3. What are your top priorities for 2022? Discuss at least three areas in need of change, under the purview of the Board of Education, and how you would address them.

My top three priorities are: (1) addressing the staff shortage; (2) providing adequate school infrastructure; and (3) improving student physical health and mental health.

To address the staff shortage, I will request a review of the ground situation to discover the precise reasons teachers retire early or leave the school system. We must pay staff a decent salary and recognize a job well done through bonuses to retain our staff. We must provide more support for classroom teachers by adding paraeducators. We must improve HR services, streamline the application process, and adjust the hiring timing to attract new graduates. I believe it is worth pursuing and recruiting experienced people from industry and government as part time staff in areas of computer science, world languages, business, vocational technology, upper-level math and science, engineering and other subjects to expand our workforce, improve learning, and potentially free up classroom space by teaching these subjects virtually.

To provide adequate school infrastructure, we should reduce temporary classrooms and increase brick and mortar classrooms to address school overcrowding and reduce redistricting frequency. We can expand existing schools vertically or add permanent additions horizontally. Wilde Lake Middle School is a great modern two-story urban school design model. We must make this a priority and seek capital investment.

To improve student physical health and mental health, we should manage screen time well at school and encourage paper version homework, create more PTA sponsored afterschool programs that promote physical exercising and in-person group teamwork / projects (e.g., let-me-run, science club, gardening club, trout raising / releasing club, crafts club, book club, chess club, etc.). We should work with parents and communities outside school, educate students about the effects of social media and mental health, and share the best practice with parents.

4. What do you believe are the strengths and weaknesses of the current Board? How have you demonstrated your ability to work with people who have diverse opinions and party affiliations?

One strength of the current Board is that the Board Members have diverse backgrounds in terms of gender, race, education, life experience, immigration experience, profession, etc. They reflect the diversity of our County. Another strength is that they can disagree, but still work together to get things done. The weakness of the current Board is that partisanship has a big influence on their decisions. Some decisions do not put students first. The Board should give more direct guidance to the Superintendent before any detailed administrative plan is developed.

In terms of working with people with diverse opinions and party affiliations, I currently serve on the Board of Education Operating Budget Review Committee and have previously served on the HCPSS Science Advisory Committee, Social Study Advisory Committee, and School Calendar Committee. I also served as a Board Member at both the Howard County Chinese School and Chinese American Parent Association of Howard County. These roles required me to work with other members with diverse opinions and party affiliations to achieve common goals and I am confident that as a school Board Member, I can continue to work with people who have diverse opinions and party affiliations to reach our common interest: commitment to the best academic performance.

5. In the recent past, the County has funded far less than the requested HCPSS budget. How would you bridge the gap?

We need to bridge the gap from both ends. The requested HCPSS budget needs to consider the fiscal reality of Howard County, which is getting more mature with less growth projected over the next decade and which has the highest tax among neighboring counties. The HCPSS annual budget increase should match the County revenue increase. The HCPSS budget should be used wisely and should prioritize academic performance and classroom instruction over transportation and devices.

At the County level, the HCPSS budget should maintain 50% or more of the budget considering there are so many school buildings, employees, and families associated with the school system. The percentage of the County budget allocated to HCPSS should be higher. The drop below 50% like we saw this year sent the wrong signal to the public.

6. What HCPSS policies do you believe should be changed regarding protections of marginalized groups?

An inclusive school system should treat everyone at school fairly, appreciate their differences, and recognize their identities. Everyone should feel safe and welcomed at school. No one should be treated less because of their race, gender, identity, or ability. Each HCPSS employee and each student should be held to a high level of inclusivity. It is not acceptable to bully, to use racist language, to exclude. Hate has no place in the halls of learning. As much as possible, the school system should try to hire staff at all positions that look like the population in our County in terms of race and gender. This is the beginning of helping our students see themselves in the school system. Inclusion is not just a slogan. It should be a central value that is reflected in our daily actions and decisions.

7. What criteria should be prioritized in redistricting?

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I believe that redistricting should only be used to address school capacity issues in a manner that is least disruptive to students. I believe in neighborhood schools and that students should attend their neighborhood schools. All that are eligible to walk / bike to school should attend the school they can walk / bike to without question. This encourages a healthy lifestyle for students and saves precious budgetary dollars on transportation by keeping money in the classroom where it belongs. As far as HS 13, the Board should only redistrict for that opening, at the HS level. As they have in previous years, they should open with Freshmen and Sophomores so as not to pull Juniors and Seniors from the school they currently attend. All high schools around HS 13 are overcrowded, so this will provide some relief, but only in reducing overcrowding not eliminating it. In addition, they should look at feeds into this school to ensure they look appropriate. Small feeds are not fair to students.

8. What do you believe are the best ways to address overcrowding in schools? What steps would you take as a Board Member to address this concern?

The best way to address overcrowding in schools is to expand school capacity locally, i.e., building new schools like HS#13 or expanding existing schools. We have only built 9 new schools out of 77 schools (12% increase) since 2000 while the population has grown 30% (249,638 in 2000 and 325,690 in 2019). School infrastructure lagged over 20 years. It is not sustainable. We welcome people to come live in Howard County and I myself am part of the newer population, but we need to build new schools and expand existing schools to match the population growth. The Board of Education cannot raise fees, taxes, or change APFO rules. As a Board Member, I would encourage the County Council to ensure adequate funding for our growing school system. They have multiple avenues to do that including looking for waste in their current budget, changing APFO rules, and changing state funding formulas. When most schools are overcrowded, redistricting does not work. The next option is to add temporary classrooms or permanent additions to existing schools where feasible. However, we see more and more portables. The temporary classrooms actually become “permanent” solutions. We just try to avoid the problem instead of addressing the problem. We should add permanent additions or add new schools using two-story urban school designs similar to Wilde Lake Middle School. School facility design can have co-location with other schools/agencies to reduce costs, maximize community use, and balance the environmental requirements.

10. What is your position on HCPSS continuing to provide virtual learning?

Two years of the pandemic have taught us the value of classroom in-person learning. Virtual learning is not for everyone and not for all curriculum, but works for some students and for some content. I suggest HCPSS compile the lessons learned from covid virtual school from an administrative, teacher, paraeducator, parent, and student perspective and evaluate whether virtual school for some is viable going forward. To address the current staff shortage issue and share teacher resources across schools, the creative virtual learning model with teacher remote and students in the classroom can be utilized.

11. How should security be handled in schools? What staffing and/or training changes do you believe should occur?

School Resource Officers are important to maintaining a safe environment for students to learn. It makes sense to have SROs now more than ever if we consider staff shortages, increased school fighting, and increased violence. SROs serve multiple functions. The first function is related to safety. SROs can address shootings in schools, have immediate contact via their radio to call in help if needed, can provide training

along with the administration to both teachers and students on what to do if there is a safety issue at school, and can be the person you want students to go to as part of see something - say something. Second, knowing there is an SRO present deters many students from taking out their frustration and aggression on others. Third, SROs can serve as career role models. In addition to teaching classes from time to time related to drugs, DUI, traffic safety, how to handle a traffic stop, and our rights and responsibilities, they can be the first point of contact for a student interested in a law enforcement career. SROs should be thoroughly vetted before entering the program and they should receive continued training throughout the year and on summer breaks.

12. Special Education has not been funded to the level deemed necessary by the HCPSS to provide adequate services. What would you do to make necessary improvements to services with limited funding?

The challenges faced by teachers and students in Special Education are problematic and need to be addressed urgently. The biggest problem is staffing. We should add more special education teachers, paraeducators, and student assistants. In order to retain and recruit student assistants and paraeducators in Special Education we need to provide a differential salary above what is paid for the same title in a regular classroom setting. We should also mandate better pay, benefits, and training to the temporary employees hired. Currently, temporary employees receive very little money, no benefits, and no paid days off, while working with special education students with the most severe disabilities and behavioral issues. Temporary employees in this field have high turnover and the current practice is not sustainable. In addition, we should reduce the overwhelming paperwork and bureaucracy faced by Special Education teachers. Documentation should be placed in an electronic system that is secure and protected, but with easy access for use in evaluation of the student's placement and progress. All Special Educators should have immediate access to communication equipment so they can readily ask for more support in any emergency situation. The school system should frequently seek the feedback from Special Education Educators to make continuous improvements to the programs.

HCPSS should work with families and the Department of Health to provide layered and wraparound services using grants, such as the recent \$2.1 million committed to expand a school-based mental health program to all 77 public schools, and to subsidize mental health resources in the community for vulnerable youth. On May 12, MSDE gave HCPSS a \$5.5 M from Maryland State Personnel Development to help improve the mathematics proficiency of elementary students with disabilities in 3rd-5th grades. These grants are important to supplement HCPSS funding and target the needed areas.

13. What will you do to hold the HCPSS accountable for consistent, equitable student outcomes across the County?

HCPSS must be held accountable for providing equitable opportunities to all students across the County. All students should be challenged to reach their fullest potential. Although the social-economic disparity in Howard County is the result of housing development at the County level and approval of new developments is outside the purview of the Board of Education, HCPSS should work with and encourage the County to address these disparities. That being said, HCPSS's implementation of universal Pre-K education according to the Blueprint can level the playing field at students' critical early learning stage. Moreover, as students spend most hours outside schools, HCPSS should engage families and communities to get more involved with their children's growth and to provide enrichment after school hours and during the summer. HCPSS should also listen to underserved communities and immigrants with language barriers whose voices are quite often not heard in our critical decisions. As no two people are alike, we cannot guarantee the same outcomes,

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but we must work with the students, parents, teachers, PTAs, and social workers to provide all students equitable opportunities to reach their fullest potential and become the best they can be.

By Authority: The People's Voice, Lisa Markovitz Treasurer