

Individual Information

Name/District James Cecil

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Education History: Bachelor of Arts Government & Politics, University of Maryland - College Park, 2002

Languages Spoken/Other Skills

Relevant Experience

List who has been compensated to provide services to your campaign. List your campaign managers. Note current cash on hand. Note your donations received and spent, although you need not include figures that are already filed on campaign finance reports.

Please see campaign finance reports once available for full details.

List organizations/groups/committees (both education-related and not) of which you are an official member.

HCPSS CAC

Columbia Community Care

1. Why are you running? Explain why you are qualified to hold this position. Please include your experiences doing volunteer or non-profit work, in Howard County and elsewhere. (Character limit please 1200)

I am running because I believe in the positive impact of education. My public school experience guided me to a career in student development at the University of Maryland where I prepare my students for success after their graduation. I have also been fortunate enough to experience communities across the country on service experiences to witness opportunity gaps firsthand, their negative impact failed systems have on communities and most importantly, on the children. So many children have their success or struggle predetermined and they deserve better. I have 17 years working in student development and higher education, managing budgets, strategic planning and solving problems. I have volunteered with the Alternative Break program at the University of Maryland on immersive community service experiences and assisted in the development of the University of Maryland Farmer's Market. In Howard County, I have served as an SCH judge for four years, volunteer for community events when possible and have most recently assisting with Columbia Community Care and efforts to ensure our neighbors have the necessities they need in this time of crisis.

2. Do you believe the Board of Education race should remain non-partisan on the ballot? If so, how is your campaign remaining non-partisan? (Character limit 1200)

Yes, I do believe that the Board of Education race should remain non-partisan. A non-partisan race allows for the broadest level of voter participation, especially in states like Maryland with a closed primary system that could exclude 3<sup>rd</sup> party and non-affiliated voters from participation until the general election. Everyone should have a voice when it comes to their children and our schools and the current format would greatly restrict those choices. With a degree in Government & Politics, I am not naïve to the fact that many candidates will have or have had a party affiliation at some point, especially if they wanted the opportunity to vote in previous primaries. However, a non-partisan race keeps the focus on the issues that are most important to our community, which is where it should be. I am committed to running an issue driven campaign and making a case for the vision I have to address them.

3. 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? (Character limit 1200)

Knowing that the world has changed significantly since the Superintendent submitted his budget request to the Board, I want to address the original intent of this question first. In presenting his budget, Dr. Martirano laid out the needs of the school system and what it would cost to fully fund those needs. Embedded in that budget were numerous initiatives to address gaps in achievement and correct mistakes made under previous boards. Mistakes like those that led to the current health fund deficit are incredibly expensive. However, the budget process is a negotiation that goes through input from the Board, the County Executive and the

County Council. Advocacy can lead to challenging conversations, but honesty about the problem is also the first step toward shedding light on just what it will take to find meaningful solutions. I believe that there are ways to be creative in identifying and diversifying funding sources whenever possible, but COVID-19 has is poised to change the fiscal landscape in ways we have never experienced before. The County Council and the County Executive will be responsible for aligning the priorities of the county with the decreased funding available to them.

4. Over time, the County Council and Board of Education have often disagreed on where responsibility lies regarding addressing overcapacity. There are varying beliefs regarding restricting development and redistricting as tools. How do you suggest the County Council and Board of Education work together to address overcapacity issues? (Character limit 1500)

The County Council and Board of Education may disagree on where responsibility lies now, but both are historically responsible for the situation we are in. County Council's past bear a great deal of responsibility for rampant development that did not include adequate impact fees to address the compounding costs associated with concentrated populations. It was not just that the county's population increased, it was that most of the increases were concentrated in areas not equipped to handle it. As a result of this type of development and a lack of adequate school sites within these communities, schools were built where they could be built, not where they should be. Boards of the past played a part in these decisions and their refusal to adjust attendance areas to distribute capacity led to the process finally needing to be comprehensive in 2019. This Board of Education has made significant efforts to maximize capacity in schools that were underutilized and address some of the overcapacity experienced in other schools. This County Council worked to pass CB-42 to increase the school surcharge fee and work continues to be done on APFO legislation to slow development in areas where schools are already beyond capacity. Further, the County Executive has included funding for the Talbott Springs ES and Hammond HS projects and long overdue deferred maintenance. In the past, one entity not doing their part was used as justification by the other to not do their own. Teamwork can only be achieved when everyone is doing their part. So, while there have been positive strides made in restoring that relationship and it will be important to continue via dialogue and collaborative action.

5. How do you define Equity? Suggest how the HCPSS can better ensure equity. Give specific examples, including how to accomplish those goals in the budget. (Character limit 1500)

I define equity in education as making sure every child has access to the resources necessary to ensure outcomes are equal regardless of one's socio-economic status, race, gender, sexual orientation or family background. Howard County has clearly defined gaps across multiple measures of achievement and the extended duration of these achievement gaps shows that the attempts being made are not enough. There has been progress toward inclusion, which is a component of equity, but equity itself is more than being inclusive. Equity requires resources to address the gaps created by access/affordability of preschool, supporting English learners, supports to offset the mental health impacts of poverty and the needs of special education

students to generate outcomes that are equal to their peers. There has been variable levels of intent to address some of these gaps, but many initiatives are considered “new” while there is still discussions around limiting cuts to existing programs. I have been disappointed in the case being made for why equity matters, how supporting students in need can actually benefit all students, why the future of our school system and the future of our county as a whole depend on the ability to achieve it. A commitment to equity will work to address the systems that generate many inequities in the first place and reduce the long-term cost to offset them.

6. What do you believe Board of Education Members can do to help students achieve their fullest potential at all levels? Please include in your answer what you believe should be done to close any achievement gaps, be specific. (Character limit 1500)

This is a differently worded question around equity and goes to show the work that needs to be done in clarifying that equity is not a radical agenda, it is supporting our students who data shows need more support than they are currently receiving. Early interventions are key, but they also must be met with early action. Reading by the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade is an early indicator of success and 9<sup>th</sup> grade is common indicator of student success/graduation. Early supports can instill the baseline necessary to meet future needs, identify/address any outside influences on student success and begin the important process of establishing relationships. These relationships are critical to early success and lay the foundation for the development of future relationships to continue success. Using restorative justice practices is another method to address some of the impediments to achievement and teach valuable skills in understanding others and conflict resolution. Student discipline practices directly correlate to student outcomes and traditional methods are clearly failing the students caught into the system. There is a financial component, but there are some systemic approaches that can mitigate some of the associated costs. A commitment to professional development around inclusion, mentorship and restorative justice are more cost effective when additional hiring is not feasible. Simply put, Board of Education Members just have to be committed and they have to continue to advocate as opposed to wringing their hands at the challenge.

7. What are three things you feel should be Board priorities in the next one to three years? (Character limit 1500)

Advocating for the needs of our students, educators and families should always be a top priority for the Board. There are many ways to do it, but there is a difference between having an opinion, listening to reports or casting a vote and passionately advocating for all students in our community. Our Board needs to be agents of change and not just within the confines of the boardroom. Further, fiscal responsibility is paramount now more than ever. Seeking out efficiencies will go from a best practice to a requirement over the next several budget cycles. Finding ways to continue to pay down the health fund deficit while maintaining as many programs/positions as possible and seeking partnership opportunities to meet shared missions together. Finally, the COVID-19 crisis demonstrates the need to reflect, re-evaluate and strategize effective technology aided instruction. Distance learning is the immediate focus, but

investments made now provide opportunities to bring increased technology to the traditional instruction once students return to the classroom.

8. Choose a 2020 local Howard County State Bill and evaluate it. (Character limit 1200)

I was interested in the recommendation by the Legislative Committee to oppose HB1511. I believe in the importance of forward thinking and strategic planning, especially around attendance area adjustments. Having a report on school capacity can be an asset in advocacy, especially if longitudinal data is included together to show the extended duration some schools have been permitted to operate over capacity without relief. Further, having to consider redistricting plans in advance would address the concern of compact and inefficient processes like the one we just went through. I get that there are concerns about losing local control of when to institute policy 6010, but HCPSS already faces influence from the state in regard to access to capital funding for school construction and guidelines for various federal funds. It seemed counterintuitive and a little bit silly to oppose a bill with actions that are good ideas to undertake anyway.

9. How would you as a Board Member, oversee, review and instruct the Superintendent? Give a specific example of each, where the Board of Education and Superintendent have fallen short, and done well. (Character limit 1500)

I have a supervisory style that I have developed over 17 years at the University of Maryland that focuses on establishing clear expectations, feedback and the opportunity to apply that feedback. There are times where behaviors assigned to an employee could just as easily have resulted from the supervision that they received from me. The same holds true for the Board and Dr. Martirano. Blame is often assigned to Dr. Martirano due to positions that the Board put he and his staff in. Using redistricting as an example as the question intends, Dr. Martirano was directed to present a plan to the Board, which he did. One of the plans included a very intentional look at addressing the concentration of poverty in some of our schools in addition to capacity, something identified as a contributor to gaps in achievement and many claim to support addressing. While I admire the ambition, there was a missed opportunity to communicate with the public as it was being compiled and introduced to make a case for the virtues of the goal. Likewise the Board missed their opportunity to engage communities in discussions and collaborate on solutions to early identified roadblocks. The food distribution efforts led by Dr. Martirano to serve our families in need have been remarkable and the resolve of the board through such times is commendable too.

10. 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 be goals of redistricting? How would you suggest those goals be met? What do you believe was done right and done wrong in the most recent redistricting? (Character limit 1500)

I've addressed this in other questions, but the priorities should be to maximize every seat available in the system. There is no longer the luxury to have seats empty in some schools while others are so far beyond their limits. Keeping communities engaged in the process should be an ongoing goal as redistricting is naturally going to be an ongoing occurrence. Our county lacks the seats needed now and lacks future funding to meet enrollment growth projections. Further, new schools will require new boundaries. Moving schools will always be a challenge, but families should be able to know in advance if the capacity realities dictate adjustments. There should be efforts to limit surprises, consider exceptions and work together. I do believe equity needs to be a consideration in terms of the negative impacts of concentrated poverty, especially in schools that are aging. Simply improving sounds nice, but the reality is that the funding support for those improvements does not arrive. Students cannot thrive on promises alone.

11. Do you believe the HCPSS is serving the needs of the Special Education community? If not, what needs to be changed? Do you believe there is enough funding for Special Education in the current HCPSS budget? Why? (Character limit 1200)

As a Special Education parent, I know the answer to be no. There are not enough special educators to meet the need, paraeducators were drastically reduced and children are not receiving the level of supports needed to fully succeed. In addition to staffing, many families struggle to find the resources to seek a diagnosis and are often frustrated by the IEP/504 process. Access to advocates to navigate the process should be internal and the process should not be adversarial. In terms of budgeting, I have deep concern about the impact of the current crisis on the proposed operating budget. The budget proposed already represented cuts to desperately needed positions and adding any new positions will be highly unlikely in FY21. It will be critical for the Board and Superintendent to begin planning longterm solutions to Special Education practices. Perpetually short sighted plans will not lead a path to successfully addressing the needs of the Special Education community.

12. In what areas of public education do you refuse to compromise, due to strong beliefs? How would you make changes in these areas? Give examples of how you collaborated and compromised with colleagues who disagreed with you. (Character limit 1200)

I refuse to compromise on the belief that every student should be provided the resources necessary to ensure their individual success. I will continue to advocate toward that belief as I have already in testimony to the Board and to the County Council. We have to continue to push for new ideas and change the perception that equity is something to be booed during Board meetings or reasons to make personal attacks against someone. Through this entire process, I have been able to have numerous conversations with those possessing opinions different than my own. The most important thing that allows me to collaborate with those I disagree with is practicing what I teach my students and listen to understand everyone I speak with. My experience may be different, but there is often common ground to be found and ways to collaborate on solutions. My work at UMD has afforded me numerous opportunities to

work on projects with those I've disagreed with. Operating with respect is paramount, providing research/justification for my beliefs to help my colleagues better understand my perspective and staying focused on the common goal have led to results that I am very proud of and continued working relationships that were not initially expected.

13. Give examples in your personal or professional life that demonstrate your willingness to hold people accountable and include transparency for the community. (Character limit 1200)

In terms of accountability, I have spent 17 years developing nearly 800 students in my time at the University of Maryland. Accountability is the best tool I have to ensure that students are working to their potential and to facilitate open discussions about when they fall short. I bring that same accountability mindset to civic engagement. My pursuit of a degree in Government & Politics is rooted in my passion to understand how our systems operate in order to effectuate change. That same conviction has led me to testify to the Board and County Council and contributed to my decision to run for the Board of Education now.