

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	Christina Delmont-Small - District 1
Campaign Address/Phone/Email	10206 Maxine Street, Ellicott City, Maryland 21042 703-434-2185 (cell) delmont_small@verizon.net
Social Media Accounts	https://www.facebook.com/ChristinaDelmontSmallBoE/
Education History	BA Political Science and Economics, Boston College
Languages Spoken/Other Skills/Relevant Experience	Member, Board of Education of Howard County (2016 - 2020); President PTA Council of Howard County (3 terms); Member, Operating Budget Review Committee (3 terms, 2 as Co-chair)

Community Interest / Position Questions

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

I'm running for re-election because there's still much work to be done to improve the transparency, oversight and accountability of the BOE/HCPSS. I bring a much needed common sense approach to the BOE and make decisions based on listening to the community and stakeholders, data and facts, not emotions.

I've been involved in the school system issues for years through my involvement at the local PTA level, the county level as president of the PTA Council of Howard County (3 terms), a member & co-chair of the Operating Budget Review Committee (OBRC), and the Citizen's Operating Budget Review Committee when a previous BOE eliminated the OBRC. I've spent time trying to make things better and want to make improvements for students because I'm deeply invested in our community and the success of all of our students. I'm not running because of one issue - I've been a long-standing advocate for students since my children entered HCPSS. My approach is to look at all aspects/processes of the school system and address where we fall short so improvements can be made. I've been criticized for asking too many questions, but to me that is the job of a member of the BOE.

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

As an incumbent, I bring perspective and experience of what the BOE needs to do to continue to work toward representing our community and making the best decisions for every student. I have an understanding of what is required and a proven track record of listening to the community, being thoughtful in my decisions and working to improve HCPSS.

Before starting a family, I worked for the Committee on Resources of the US House of Representatives and investigated waste, fraud, and abuse in federal agencies. I also drafted legislation, managed and negotiated with stakeholders to establish common ground and find solutions. I know how to ask the hard questions, listen, get answers, understand problems and work with individuals and organizations with different points of view. In addition, I spent part of my career in the private sector and bring a business oriented perspective that's enabled me to understand the challenges HCPSS has with the business operations of the school system.

As president of the PTA Council of Howard County I advocated for students, parents and educators at the local, county, and state level. I served and co-chaired the BOE's Operating Budget Review Committee for three years and when the BOE disbanded the OBRC, established a Citizen's OBRC with the teacher's union because I believed it was important for the community to continue to have formal input into the operating budget process.

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

Testified before:

BOE of Howard County on HCPSS policies/budgets (Citizen, Co-chair of the Operating Budget Review Committee (OBRC), President of the PTA Council of Howard County)

Howard County Council on legislation/resolutions (Citizen, President of the PTA Council of Howard County, Individual BOE Member)

MD Senate Education, Health, and Environment Affairs Cmte on SB302: The Accountability in Education Act of 2018 (Citizen)

MD House Ways and Means Cmte on HB 1603: County Boards of Education – Removal of County Superintendents (Individual BOE Member)

When employed by the Committee on Resources, I was responsible for preparing investigative and legislative hearings, which included research, thorough understanding of subject matter, writing questions for committee members to elicit pertinent information during the hearings, and making necessary changes to legislation.

Public Volunteer Work

Various leadership & volunteer positions with local PTAs, PTA Council of Howard County (PTAHC), Maryland PTA; served as PTAHC Representative on the School Nutrition Advisory Cmte, Joint Task Force on School Safety, Physical Security Subcmte, OBRC, and Citizen's OBRC

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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)

Redistricting should be based on capacity and proximity, and avoid concentrating poverty in schools when possible. However, poverty concentration is due to affordability, density, and location of housing - the responsibility of county government which will continue unless development/zoning decisions are changed.

I'm developing a feeder system to provide predictability of school assignments, use of current/projected capacity and eliminate small feeds. I'll also continue to insist the BOE take an active role in county/state decisions impacting school capacity. We need solutions that add capacity or utilize current and future capacity in different ways.

Unless we have these 3 things - location, county funding, and time to build a school, we will never be able to properly address overcrowding. The BOE can't do this alone - the BOE, community and county executive/county council must work together. For example, a good first step would be to align the Howard County General Plan and growth/zoning designations with HCPSS school regions because we are essentially speaking two different languages and this has not served our students or community well.

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

The goal should be for as many students to attend their community school. Families become invested in their schools - no one wants to be redistricted, so when we choose to redistrict, it should be done to even out capacity. As enrollment increases and capacity decreases this becomes more difficult - we are getting very close to the point where we will no longer be able to redistrict ourselves out of not having enough capacity. Keeping as many students at their community schools enables them to be close to home and increases the participation of their parents/families in their education. It allows parents to carpool with their neighbors if their child needs a ride and they are not available to take them. Students who are in walking distance are able to get to/from school if their parents are unavailable to drive them or they want to stay after school for academic help or activities. In addition, bussing students who can walk utilizes much needed funding that could instead be used for the students in the classroom.

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

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We will not be able to continue to redistrict ourselves out of overcrowded schools. If we want to continue to have our schools operate as they are now, unless we are able to increase capacity through additions, new school construction, or additional relocatable classrooms, things will have to change. We should have started years ago to have a plan as to how we are going to deal with this. We must look at the criteria other districts use for school construction and evaluate our requirements, such as increasing the size of the schools we build. All solutions will require additional or reallocation of funding to the operating and/or capital budget. As enrollment continues to increase and since the BOE is unable to raise its own revenue, we need to work with our county and state funding authorities to secure the necessary funding.

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)

The BOE, County Executive, and County Council all have to recognize that we've compensated for not having adequate capacity by redistricting and using relocatable classrooms. Time, land, and funding are all needed to build new schools. We have not opened a high school since 2005, a middle school since 2014, and just opened an elementary school in 2018. According to enrollment for January 2020, countywide we have only 515 high school seats available, are 417 seats short for middle school and 1432 seats short for elementary school. We need to work together to develop clear definitions, accurate measures and a process to align enrollment, school capacity, residential development, and zoning so that the school system and the county are no longer at cross purposes.

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

As defined in COMAR Chapter 13A.01.06: That every student has access to the opportunities, resources, and educational rigor they need throughout their educational career to maximize academic success and social/emotional well-being and to view each student's individual characteristics as valuable.

We need to make sure all students are achieving academically and emotionally, the Special Education community calls this "presuming competence." We need to ensure that students are appropriately challenged and not underestimate their abilities and have class offerings that will allow them to achieve this. We have to measure with appropriate data and when there are achievement gaps, we need a plan to address them with evidence-based practices.

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)

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In the past we did more evaluation of data based on student outcomes and used it to change and justify program spending. We need evidence-based student programs. As one member of the board I have been pushing for this, but the whole board has to be in agreement in order to provide direction to the superintendent. For example, from 2010 - 2016, Hammond High School increased graduation rates for African American, Hispanic and students with special needs, as a result of increasing access to demanding coursework for all students, comprehensive academic supports, promoting cultural proficiency, and student voice and was named a School of Opportunity in 2017. We have to look at the data and practices to see how this can be applied to all of our schools, and provide meaningful classes at all levels that challenge and ensure all of our students are successful.

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)

Yes, the BOE race should remain non-partisan on the ballot. I keep partisan politics out of education decisions and my focus is on what is best for every student, whether it is student privacy, civil rights, access to resources, funding decisions, policy decisions, etc.

I'm less concerned with what political party a candidate is affiliated with and more concerned with their willingness and ability to hold the school system accountable to the BOE, community and taxpayers of Howard County for all student achievement and the spending of tax dollars.

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

Reinforce the BOE as a check and balance on the superintendent/school system by providing clear expectations and guidance to the superintendent and holding the superintendent accountable to those expectations.

Institute responsible budgeting and spending of tax dollars that takes into account current and future needs, and linking funding decisions to evaluated, data-driven student outcomes.

Improve the redistricting process through a thorough review of Policy 6010 - School Attendance Areas including community input, decisions based on capacity and proximity, working toward a feeder system, and working with the County government to align the General Plan and development decisions with HCPSS school planning areas.

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)

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The budget process is broken - it's a process that over and over results in sending a budget to the County Executive that does not prioritize students outcomes and ignores economic realities. The result is a failure to serve our community well.

Just because many accept that we must ask for more than is economically feasible because the County Executive can only cut, and not add to the budget, is not a realistic process. When we send the budget to the County Executive we create a false impression that the budget will be fully funded and false hope that reductions will not need to be made.

In addition, it is unrealistic and irresponsible that we do not factor the impact current budget decisions will have on future budget decisions.

We need detailed information from our experts as to what to prioritize when reductions need to be made. We need to better prepare now, and not wait until the mad rush in May when there will not be adequate time in the process to make millions of dollars in reductions. Rushed decisions are often not rooted in thoroughly analyzed data and therefore put good student outcomes at risk.

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

I don't believe that the state should be involved in local education issues and that the BOE needs to maintain local control. Bills requiring reporting requirements for data is already collected and available through the HCPSS or the Maryland Longitudinal Data System are not necessary. Bills requiring additional revenue from transfer taxes for the school system needs to be earmarked for that use. Bills impacting redistricting that put current BOE policy in state law and would make it difficult for the BOE to change its policy and erodes local control of the school system.

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

The appropriate class size depends on the needs of the students in the class. Research shows that smaller class sizes are most beneficial to student achievement and well-being for K-2. Students who need additional supports would also benefit from smaller class sizes, as would their teachers.

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

We should depend less on standardized assessments for students and allow teachers to evaluate student progress with data to back up those decisions with teacher created lessons and tests. I trust that teachers are better able to evaluate student mastery than a standardized test. Other professions have employee reviews and we should examine incorporating as appropriate into teacher and staff evaluations. Also, a component of the evaluation that includes parent and/or student input would also provide additional information and perspective that could be helpful in providing a well-rounded evaluation.

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

The biggest safety concern is bullying and how it is handled in our schools. The current implementation of policy and procedures is not consistent across schools. At the school level, bullying incidents are not being consistently handled or recorded. There are too many parents and students not being told that there is a formal process for reporting bullying. We need to be vigilant in training school-based staff on bullying procedures and appropriately interact with both the victim and the alleged bully and their families. We do not have the ability to eliminate bullying, but we do have the ability to consistently handle and track how it is being addressed in all of our schools and do what we can to reduce incidents. We also need to look at what mental health supports are in schools and how they can be used.

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)

Provide clear expectations and guidance to the superintendent and hold the superintendent accountable to those expectations. Ensure that he provides data to show that the programs the school system has in place is improving student outcomes.

As a current member of the BOE, performance of the superintendent or my opinion of his performance is a personnel matter, and I am not allowed by law to discuss this.

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)

I've been hearing about issues with special education as a member of SECAC prior to being a member of the BOE. I'm concerned about the number of teachers, staff, and parents who have testified before the BOE about their concerns with special education and the number of parents who have reached out to me regarding their concerns about special education and non compliance with IEPs and 504s. We need to fully fund Special Education and ensure that we have highly qualified, appropriately trained educators working with our students with disabilities. For example, we have increased the number of support staff working with students with special needs instead of qualified teachers and this ratio needs to be adjusted. Also, a position dedicated to compliance to check IEPs and identify areas needing additional staff training.