

ETHICS BALLOT QUESTIONNAIRE

Howard County Board of Education Primary 2024

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 4,800 members in Howard County and sponsor the non-partisan Ethics Ballot. If you would like to seek endorsement to The Ethics Ballot please return this Questionnaire to EthicsBallot@Gmail.com by midnight Tuesday March 26. Please note that all questionnaires are published on the website, 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. Feel free to add additional pages with question numbers noted to provide more information on each question as needed, or fill in more space herein. Be sure to return via email in Word or text format.

Name/District:

Antonia Watts

District 2

Campaign Address/Phone/Email/Social Media/Website (if not on MD Board of Elections site)

Campaign manager: Self

Educational & Employment History

B.S. Mechanical Engineering

M.S. Bioengineering

M.A. Secondary Education (Math and Physics Certification)

Work:

Crash and Safety Testing

Education: middle and high school math and engineering teacher

Relevant Experience (including fiscal and budget management)

Current Board of Education Member

Causes financially supported, fund raising work promoted

1. Why are you running for this office? What qualifications do you uniquely bring to hold this office? Describe why you feel you have a viable campaign.

I am running because it is urgent that we develop a system where every child has access to an education that fits their needs. In my current term, my focus has centered on student achievement, educator support, and fiscal responsibility achieved through the development of strong accountability measures. To improve identification of reading difficulties, I increased access to a reading screening tool for all elementary school students. I added several positions to special education to handle administrative duties, freeing our special educators to spend more time focused on students. Additionally, I was instrumental in redesigning the budgetary process to increase community engagement and advocacy for funding for public education. While I am proud of the accomplishments that I have highlighted, I am running because there is still much work to be done. Finally, as the incumbent with a strong track record, I am confident in my ability to raise the necessary funds to attract voters on election day.

2. What experience do you have with the HCPSS? Have you ever testified before the Board of Education? What positions did you take? (Those with vast experience, pick most important to you.)

Currently, I am on the Board of Education and have served in this role since 2020. Yes, I have testified before the Board of Education prior to my election. I have specifically testified about the need to continue to support the early childhood special education programs like Infants and Toddlers and the Learning Together Program both of which give children the necessary foundation to support their educational needs.

3. Funding all the needs of the HCPSS community is harder than ever, given added mandated funding of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future program, and the past use of one-time Covid funds for recurring costs. How do you believe funding shortfalls should be addressed? What areas of the HCPSS budget do you believe are the best areas to cut in order to meet funding needs? Are there areas that you believe should be the last to ever have funding cut?

The funding shortfalls should be addressed by both increasing the county share for education and reevaluating the programs that HCPSS currently runs. There are no “best areas” to cut as each item provides services to students. Teacher pay is the last place that should be cut.

4. Where do you think school construction should be prioritized? How would you address getting schools built faster where they are most needed? Include your thoughts about how to juggle maintenance needs as well.

School construction should prioritize capacity in the areas where students live. It is critical that HCPSS evaluate new ways to build schools such as using Private, Public, Partnerships. The current capital funding system lacks the ability to address both capacity and maintenance needs. The state legislature needs to develop a dedicated funding source to address continued maintenance of aging schools.

5. How do you think overcapacity school concerns should be addressed? Do you believe current enrollment projection methods need to be changed? If so, how? What, if anything, should be done, when enrollment ends up significantly higher than projected project estimates?

The county planning office needs to work to integrate school needs when planning housing needs. The current enrollment projections have a high level of accuracy which could potentially be improved through collaboration with the county. Using policy 6010, it is feasible to address enrollment needs through boundary adjustments.

6. Do you believe the Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO) should be strengthened, weakened or left the same regarding school capacity? Why? Note any desired changes. Note how you feel the Board of Education can or should be involved in APFO.

APFO is not keeping up with the pace of construction in the county, the county budget share for HCPSS is decreasing, and inflation is rising. Because of these and other mitigating factors, it is difficult to pinpoint one item that would single-handedly improve school capacity. This requires that the Board of Education advocate at the county, state, and even federal level for the necessary resources to fund education to meet the needs of all students.

7. Describe positions you have taken, votes you have made, or testimony you have given that you feel is the most important regarding HCPSS issues. Describe how you championed causes, include at least one example of any of your positions or votes that you regret, or about which you feel differently.

As the incumbent to the Board of Education, I have taken numerous votes in support of teachers and students throughout my tenure. The most important votes are around policy and budget as those are far reaching.

While my advocacy during COVID resulted in the return of students with disabilities to in person learning, I do regret not formally pushing for a comprehensive return to in person learning plan at the same time.

8. How do you feel altercations should be handled in schools? Include any staffing changes you believe should occur.

Altercations in school should be handled both proactively, through relationship and community building and retroactively, with consistently applied consequences.

9. What HCPSS policies do you believe should be changed regarding protections of marginalized groups? Include in your answer your views on how to address achievement gaps.

Policy 1080 is the educational equity policy. This policy points to the need for resources and attention to marginalized groups. There is room to strengthen the policy to add in accountability measures that address the expected outcomes for marginalized communities. As the current policy chair, adding in this section for all policies is a future goal of mine.

10. What criteria should be prioritized in redistricting?

Capacity should be the priority for redistricting.

11. Special education funding has increased over the last several years, but special education student outcomes have not improved. How would you address the legal requirements for students with disabilities to ensure positive outcomes?

During my tenure, I was able to successfully modify the superintendent's evaluation. That evaluation now includes measurable outcomes expected by student groups which include students with disabilities. Those same items have now become the five focus areas for the school improvement plans

developed by each principal. Additionally, the Board now receives regular reporting about the outcomes for each of those focus areas. This has increased transparency to the community about the performance and future of students in the school system. This should highlight the needs of those students that are not being served by HCPSS.

12. What research, contract accountability and financial data would you require before supporting a procurement contract? Include in your answer what changes you would recommend to avoid service failures like we experienced recently with the bus system.

In my term as Board chair, I changed the contract process to ensure that contracts went through Board legal counsel before final sign off. This process change was able to catch contract inconsistencies. Additionally, all contracts now include the right to terminate clauses as well as language that clearly defines what happens if the terms of the contract is unfulfilled. I am also in the process of working with procurement to add an accountability section to contracts so that HCPSS has a way to determine if the contractors met their proposed outcomes. This will help determine whether the contract should be renewed.

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