

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 by midnight May 24, 2022. 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.

Name/District: Meg Ricks, district 1

Campaign Address/Phone/Email

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Educational History

BA Anthropology, Brigham Young University

Languages Spoken/Other Skills/Relevant Experience

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

When I thought about what I wanted to see in a BOE candidate- someone who has experience advocating for and has spent time in our county schools, someone who is not looking for a stepping stone to higher office, someone who doesn't have an axe to grind or wants to push any particular agenda or ideology, someone who will always act with the best interest of all students in mind and not to make life easier for any particular industry or politician or party, someone who is willing to listen and to work towards common goals with others even if they don't agree on everything- I realized that person was me. My goal in life has been to help others, to lift where I stand, and bloom where I'm planted. That's why I decided to run.

I feel my campaign is viable because I have over a decade of experience advocating for education. I've had the opportunity to work with diverse groups of people. I've spent a lot of time inside HCPSS schools and attending and watching meetings of the Board of Education. I've also attended and watched other county meetings. I've now had one child go through K-12 in HCPSS and I have two more who will be in the system through 2026 and 2030 respectively. I've had enthusiastic support for my campaign from people around the county, familiar with my work.

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've been a PTA President (4 years), Treasurer (4 years), and Corresponding Secretary (3 years). I've also been a member of the PTA Council of Howard County board for four years, including one year as treasurer and the last three as policy chair. I've served on HCPSS policy review committees including- Policy 10000 Student, Parent, Family and Community Engagement, 4010 Donations/4020 Fundraising by Schools and School-Sponsored Organizations, Policy 3030 Research Involving Employees and Students, and I attended 6010 School Attendance Areas when the PTACHC member of the committee was not able to.

I have delivered testimony in person (or on-line) or sent in written testimony to the Board of Education, the County Council, the County Executive, and even the Planning Board. I've done this as an individual as well as a few times on behalf of my PTA as a PTA President. The issues I have advocated for include addressing school overcrowding, High School 13 site selection, strengthening the county's Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO), school start times, and the school system budget. I've also attended countless meetings including Board of Education, County Council, joint meetings of the previous two bodies, BOE Coffee and Conversations, PTA Presidents, Community Advisory Council (CAC), and BOE/Superintendent twice annual meetings, and PTACHC board meetings with the BOE/Superintendent. I also attended all but the first of the Redistricting Committee meetings held in

the spring of 2018 where three members of the BOE met with various departments to better understand and try to improve the redistricting process.

Every job I've had has involved teaching, educating, or coaching in some aspect. I'm currently a preschool teacher's assistant. I've also spent a lot of time in the schools doing volunteer and PTA work, including working directly with students and teachers.

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

Yes I have.

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.

Funding- We need to make sure we have the school capacity that we need, the proper maintenance for those schools, the staffing to successfully and safely run our schools, and we need to provide the materials needed for teaching and learning. All of this requires that we make funding our schools a priority. I will continue to advocate for the funding we need to ensure we have what it takes to help every student succeed.

Supports- We need to make sure that we're setting up our students and teachers for success. We need to ensure that our students with special needs are getting the supports they are entitled to. We need to address mental health and assist students and families in accessing professionals and programs that can help with these growing needs. Staff mental health also needs to be a priority. We need to continue to push for healthy school start times for all levels and to continue to invest in social emotional learning; diversity, equity, and inclusion; and school safety. We want all students to feel and be safe at school, to feel like they belong, and to feel like they can succeed.

Communication- We need to do a better job getting information from the school system out to families and to the community. Different communication formats should be consistently used to increase the reach. Parent and community organizations can be encouraged to help get the word out. Websites should be kept up to date with current information. We should translate essential, timely announcements into multiple languages and make sure that people are getting them in the language they are most comfortable with.

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 has been that many members have done a good job of sharing board-related information on social media helping to highlight important issues affecting the school system. The current board has also done a good job of keeping meetings to their allotted time. I think these improvements have helped make it easier for stakeholders to participate in the work of the board. One weakness has been predictable 'blocks' of votes giving the impression of partisan division. I think that makes people feel like the board isn't effective or that they might be acting in the interest of politics rather than in the best interests of students.

For many years I have worked side by side with people of differing political and other views. I truly believe that I don't need to agree on everything to be able to work together with others on our common goals. My husband and I have been registered with different political parties since well before we met and continue to be registered with different political parties. There are some things we disagree on but we love and respect one another and always try to hear each other out. I'm very proud to have people with diverse backgrounds and views supporting my campaign.

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

My hope would be that the county council can fund the budget requested by the Board of Education, but, lately, that has not ended up being the case. If cuts have to be made, avoiding cuts that will directly impact the classroom should be prioritized. The board should regularly look for efficiencies that reduce costs without sacrificing quality. I am hopeful that the county can prioritize and work to move forward pedestrian safety improvements and sidewalk building projects to help us save on transportation costs for many years to come. We should also be proactive in seeking grants and working with the county government to identify potential sources for additional revenue that can be earmarked to supplement and not supplant school funding.

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

There are currently several HCPSS policies that address this topic. It's not always that a policy needs to be changed, it's sometimes that it needs to be better implemented and followed. We need to make sure school is a safe and supportive place for all. Incidents of hate, bias, harassment, or discrimination

need to be taken very seriously and addressed quickly. We need to make sure that the process for reporting problems is clear and accessible. We need to work to create a culture of acceptance and belonging. Unfortunately many students do not feel accepted. Suicide prevention training for staff and for students can help save lives, especially those of our LGBTQ+ students who are at greater risk.

As a child and teen, I benefited from having teachers that reflected the diversity of our community. All students benefit from "windows" (learning about the experiences of people different from themselves) and "mirrors" (seeing people who are like them in positions of authority/accomplishing goals/finding success). I would like to work to make our school system the place where the best and brightest teachers, teachers who reflect our community, teachers with experience and passion, want to come to work and to stay once they're here. Students should learn about the history and contributions of all groups to what our nation is today. We can celebrate our diversity and learn about what we share in common.

7. What criteria should be prioritized in redistricting?

Boundaries must be redrawn when we open a new school and as a growing county we desperately need to be opening new schools. We are already years behind, as evidenced by our growing fleet of "relocatable classrooms." Overcrowding exacerbates every issue that we face in schools and creates additional problems. At the rate we are building residential development vs. schools, in time, every school is going to be facing overcrowding. This is why we need to address capacity first and foremost. The other factors outlined in policy 6010 then help us to select the best plan to address capacity without creating new problems. We don't want to concentrate poverty, create small feeds, move the same children multiple times, or put walkers onto buses that we can't afford and don't have anyone to drive. We also need to secure school sites in the areas where capacity is needed now and where it will be needed in the future. This will allow making attendance area boundaries to be a far easier process than it is currently.

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?

We need to recognize that overcrowding is an equity issue. It's not just the result of wealthy parents trying to crowd into the perceived "best" schools. It is a result of an imbalance in our community planning. Residential development has far exceeded the necessary infrastructure to support it in many parts of the county.

The “A” in APFO doesn’t stand for awesome, amazing, or above average, it stands for adequate. We should not be undermining the law that ensures we have a bare minimum of the public facilities needed for our population. The school system and the board, along with the community, need to advocate for adequate school facilities. We want to be able to welcome new students (whether they live in affordable housing, the most expensive home in the county, or somewhere in between) into schools where they can attend class inside brick and mortar buildings and not be packed like cattle into overcrowded halls and cafeterias. The school system needs the time to prepare for additional residential growth.

When we do go through the redistricting process to address overcrowding we need to have the data to make the best decisions. We need to have a consistent application of the different considerations so that we don’t have one set of rules for one part of the county and a different set of rules for another part of the county.

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

Some students thrived in virtual learning. It would be great if we could continue to have a virtual learning option available for families that want it. Virtual learning is also helpful for providing students access to classes that may not otherwise be available at their school. I do not, however, see our schools returning to an all virtual format as we did at the beginning of last year.

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

School safety is not a one person job. It really does take a whole community. We must start while students are young to give them tools for dealing with conflict and seeking help when needed. We must not be afraid to speak up and say something if we see something that does not seem right. I believe we can find a way to get the benefits of the School Resource Officer (SRO) program while not creating a fearful environment for students. Every student should both feel safe at school and be safe at school. Regular review and evaluation of the program is crucial to make sure that it is a positive for all students.

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?

Families shouldn't have to fight to get the services and accommodations their children need to learn. We need to stop asking staff to do more and more with less and less. We need appropriate staffing levels; we need training to help all staff who work with students with special needs; we need to make it a priority. We need to help the community understand that special education isn't a niche interest, it's an essential part of every school and has impacts on every classroom, and every student. With more resources, we can get out of crisis mode and into a more proactive mode where we can identify the students in need of supports that we are now missing.

We also need a way to vet and allow professionals who are already working successfully with some of our students with special needs to be able to provide their services within the schools so that we don't have to duplicate effort or unintentionally stymie it.

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

Currently, the school system collects and compiles data, breaking various measures down by different groups of students to identify trends and gaps. Individual schools come up with plans to address gaps as part of their school improvement plans. I think that having each school work on this problem independently can be a good way to find potential solutions, but my hope is that we can learn from what is working or not working at different schools and see if we can replicate positive results. I think we need to find a way to incentivize stakeholder participation in this process. A link to a survey buried at the bottom of a long email is not going to entice many people to participate. I think we would benefit from hearing from the experiences of current students and recent graduates. I think we need to see how mental health and other life challenges are affecting student outcomes. We need to continue to look at the data and evaluate how we are doing and if our efforts to close gaps have been effective. We need to continue asking how we can improve and how we can ensure that every student can be successful.

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