

Individual Information

Name/District

Antonia Barkley Watts District 2

Campaign Address/Phone/Email

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Social Media Accounts

<https://www.facebook.com/watts4education>

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Education History

BS Mechanical Engineering University of Delaware

MS Bioengineering University of California Berkeley

MA Secondary Education University of Michigan

Languages Spoken/Other Skills

English

Relevant Experience

I am a certified Maryland educator with classroom experience at the secondary and post-secondary level. Prior to becoming an educator, I worked as an engineer in crash and safety testing. In this role, I analyzed data and derived cost effective yet innovative solutions based on that data. Currently, I serve on the Howard County Library Board of Trustees which requires understanding of a large budget and its impact on the fidelity of the system.

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 report

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

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

Howard County Public Library Board of Trustees
NAACP

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 it is urgent that we develop a school system where every child has access to an education that fits their needs. There is an opportunity gap in our community and it is important that we focus on closing it to achieve better outcomes for our students. I first started my work to close the opportunity gap in 2005. I was a volunteer serving as the program coordinator for a tutoring program run by the NAACP. In this capacity, I worked to give students additional resources that they did not receive at school. It was a valuable experience because I worked hand-in-hand with community members and parents to fulfill the needs of the students. Currently, I volunteer on the Board of Trustees for the Howard County Library System. In this role, I am responsible for working with my colleagues to develop policies that relate to the management of the library and to the management of its CEO. The structure and responsibilities are similar to that of the Board of Education. This means that I have recent and relevant experience working on a policy board. With a background in education and an ability to analyze data and budgets, I am uniquely qualified for this role.

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 believe that the Board of Education race should remain non-partisan on the ballot. By doing so, it opens up more lines of communication because there are no underlying assumptions about anyone's political views. I have had productive conversations with many people about their concerns regarding the school system that may not have occurred otherwise. Because of the vast number of challenges facing public education, it is important to have diverse voices in the conversation to develop more potential solutions. Also, a partisan race might make things more divisive.

To remain non-partisan, my campaign has welcomed conversations from all members of the community. I understand that rich communication between different groups adds to the conversation.

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)

I believe that the superintendent's budget reflected the real needs of the school system. In that regard, it was just right. It was important to have a complete picture of the needs to truly appreciate challenges facing the system. However, it was an aspirational budget. While I believe that education is very important and I have dedicated the last decade of my life to it, we are part of a whole county and education is not the only service that the county provides. The superintendent's budget is more than the county can provide to all organizations combined.

I believe that we must start the budget conversation by first determining our priorities as a school system and then fund budget items accordingly. It is imperative that we prioritize services that directly impact our students and their ability to learn in the classroom. We need to ensure that we do not dilute the level of services provided to our students when addressing budget shortfalls. To accomplish this, it will be important to expand partnerships and collaboration efforts with other county services to reduce unnecessary spending.

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)

A positive working relationship between the County Council and Board of Education is important to the future of HCPSS. Moving to a district representation model allows school board members to establish stronger communication channels with the district county representative. Capacity discussions should be ongoing at every working meeting between the two groups. Fortunately, the two groups meet regularly and can make this part of the agenda. During these conversations, the County Council should continue to explain any current legislation and its potential impact on the school system. The school board should communicate areas of concern about pending legislation. Additionally, I believe it's important for the superintendent and the county executive to meet regularly and publicly to discuss this issue as well.

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)

Equity is becoming a buzzword in education. It is important that people understand that equity is not equality. Equality is giving everyone the same thing. Equity is giving people what they need, which means that everyone may not get the same thing. I define equity as conditions created to eliminate the obstacles to opportunities. To ensure equity in HCPSS, we must assess the needs of our vulnerable populations which includes students with socioeconomic hardships, special education students, racial minorities, etc. Then, the school system has to dedicate resources to those groups to help them thrive in academic settings. The resources put in place will vary depending on the group but may include increasing access to school counselors, more highly effective teachers, or technological support.

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)

I believe Board of Education members can help students achieve their full potential by developing student-centered policies supported by research. The achievement gap is directly correlated to the opportunity gap. The achievement gap looks at the output or outcome. The opportunity gap focuses on the input or access that a student has to education. If we close the opportunity gap, we will close the achievement gap. Students from traditionally disadvantaged families have significantly fewer educational opportunities compared to their peers. This gap starts even before kindergarten. Children without access to early education may enter school up to two academic years behind their peers and may never catch up. I will work to expand the number of high quality and affordable pre-K programs available to our children. In HCPSS, not all schools have the same academic offerings. All children must have access to academically challenging curricula taught by high quality and experienced educators. I will work on the expansion of access to advanced classes. Finally, the district must have inclusive hiring practices to increase educator diversity. Studies show that students of color perform better when they have educators who look like them.

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

The three things I feel the Board should prioritize in the next 1-3 years are: closing the opportunity gap; teacher recruitment/retention; and community involvement. These

three items are paramount to the future success of our school system. We are currently one of the leading counties in the nation for education. In order to maintain this status, we must work to close the opportunity gap by offering every student the highest level of instruction from highly-qualified educators.

Currently, there are fewer college graduates going into the field of education, so recruiting quality educators, especially teachers of color, is already a challenge. Therefore, we must seek to recruit from alternative pathway programs and historically black colleges and universities as well as from traditional teaching programs. Once we have hired amazing educators we have to be sure to retain them by giving them the support that they require to be successful in a demanding field. Additionally, we must also make the workplace welcoming through equity, inclusivity, and implicit bias training.

Lastly, I believe the board should work to increase community involvement among those not often present in the conversation about education. Howard County is a diverse community but few voices are represented in the conversation.

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

Howard County bill HB8-2020 is a bill that did not get much attention but has the potential to be very impactful. This bill requires that a fiscal analysis be provided to the public at least two working days before any public testimony about the bill in question. This gives the public a chance to learn about the bill's financial impact and form an educated opinion in advance of the county council's public hearing. By providing this information, all stakeholders have the same information about the fiscal impact of any legislation. This makes any discussion about the bill more rich. Plus, it adds an additional layer of transparency to the bill.

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)

The role of the Superintendent is often not clearly defined. Because of this, it is difficult to oversee, review and instruct the person in that role. To mitigate this problem, the Board of Education should work to develop clear and measurable goals to assess the performance of the Superintendent. Then, the Superintendent should also be evaluated by educators, members of the community and by students. Ideally, a 360-degree evaluation process would be used to gather all of the feedback. This process would

keep the Superintendent accountable to the community and to previously established goals.

The Board and the Superintendent fell short most recently on achieving common goals surrounding redistricting. However, I feel encouraged that both the Board and Superintendent agreed on the implementation of Black Lives Matter week of action into the curriculum for Black History Month. This leaves me hopeful that they can continue to work together for what is best for our students in Howard County.

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)

Using policy 6010 as a guide and to adequately capitalize on the resources of the school system, the “efficient use of available space” is the top priority. It is fiscally responsible for the system to ensure that each school is within the specified capacity targets. The second priority is consideration of the “long-range enrollment, capital plan and capacity need of school infrastructure.” By planning for the long-term needs of the school system, there is less need to move students as frequently. This would promote community stability in the long run. The final priority is “the socioeconomic composition of the school population as measured by participation in the federal FARMS program.” Schools with higher concentrations of poverty correlate to those with less educational opportunities. To close the achievement gap, we must close the opportunity gap. Therefore, it is necessary to balance the FARMS rates throughout the county.

At the outset of the process, the county was well-intentioned. However, at some point, there was a communication breakdown. There was inadequate transparency about the development of the various plans. Community members felt as if their concerns were not heard while others were caught off guard by the process.

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)

There is a staffing crisis in special education which creates challenges to serving all the needs of all the children. The increase in the number of special education staff reflected in the budget is an important way to address this concern. However, it is critical to hire

highly qualified special educators who are trained to handle the educational needs of the special education population. Currently, special educators are spread thin with large caseloads and little protected time to complete their administrative duties. Once we have those educators in place, they must have a schedule that allows them to properly perform their duties.

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 guns in public schools. School building should be a safe and inviting environment for all. There is no need for guns to enter a school building when there is not an active threat. Community policing is important and we should have a strong relationship with HCPD. However, any additional security measures should be proactive and should not interfere with the learning environment. This includes increasing access to mental health professionals, creating a positive school climate, and using restorative practices to foster positive relationships. A balance between physical safety and psychological health is important.

Disagreements are part of life and how you handle them displays your character as a person. In my personal and professional life, I have faced many situations that required collaboration and compromise with people with different opinions. I worked to redesign the curriculum for the then new Common Core Geometry standards with two other teachers who had a different teaching style than I did. Through discussion, we understood the strengths that each brought to the process and successfully incorporated those into the lesson plans.

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)

As an engineer, I worked in crash and safety testing. This role required me to work with almost every other group in the company as well as suppliers. It was a collaborative environment and yet there were times when it was necessary to discuss unmet obligations. These conversations started with the successes of the project and then pivoted to areas of concern. Often, a simple conversation was enough to get the project back on track.

14. For incumbents, what do you feel is your legacy you have left so far on the HCPSS? For other candidates, what do you want your legacy to be and why are you the best choice to create it? (Character limit 1200)

I want my legacy to be my commitment to transparency. My goal is to make sure that my community is informed and that they view me as a valuable resource. Also, I want my legacy to be my willingness to have open and honest conversations with many groups of people because having courageous conversations are vital to our growth and development as an educational powerhouse.

I am the best person to create this legacy for several reasons. I have first-hand classroom experience to understand the real impact of decisions made at the board level. I have the data analysis skills to evaluate information presented before the board. Plus, I have worked with large budgets and understand how changes impact the fidelity of the system.

Thank you, People's Voice for continuing to ask questions and provide a platform to reach many members of the community.