

## ETHICS BALLOT QUESTIONNAIRE

### Howard County Board of Education – 2026 primary

Name: Lanlan Xu

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Educational History:

PhD degree in Public Policy from Indiana University and German Literature from Georgetown University.

Languages Spoken/Other Skills/Relevant Experience:

I bring a unique combination of executive leadership, deep institutional knowledge of HCPSS, and a global academic perspective:

- **Executive Leadership & Policy Expertise:** I currently serve as Vice President of Health Policy at a policy research firm, where I advise on national strategies to improve healthcare access and quality. My prior experience includes senior roles at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the White House. I am an expert at managing large-scale budgets and using data to drive national-level results.
- **HCPSS Advisory & Advocacy:** I have a "day-one" understanding of our school system. I am an active member of the Board of Education's Operating Budget Review Committee (OBRC), the PTA Council of Howard County (PTACHC) Legislative Committee, and HCPSS Policy and Curriculum Committees. These roles have given me technical insight into our \$1B+ budget and the policy issues facing our district.
- **Proven Community Connector:** I am a "servant leader" with a track record of getting things done. From chairing the Howard County AAPI Commission to serving as a Trustee for the Horizon Foundation, a member of the Local Children's Board, and a Commissioner on the Maryland State's Hate Crime Response and Prevention Commission, I have consistently built bridges between diverse communities and essential resources.
- **Proficient in Chinese language,** one of the most widely spoken non-English languages in Howard County: I am a native Mandarin speaker since I immigrated from China for graduate school. I also speak German and hold a Ph.D. in German Literature.

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1. Describe why your campaign is viable and what makes you uniquely qualified to serve on the Board of Education.

I am running because I believe every child deserves the chance to thrive, every teacher deserves the support to excel, and every family deserves a voice in shaping our schools. My **'STEP UP'** approach—**S**upport, **T**ransparency, **E**mpowerment, **P**reparation, **U**nity, and **P**rogress—is designed to ensure that all our students can discover their unique paths and realize their full potential.

Since launching my campaign in August 2025, we've built strong momentum and broad support. To date, we've raised over \$42,000 from grassroots donors and outpacing all other BOE candidates. My campaign is currently endorsed by:

- Howard County Education Association
- State Delegates Natalie Zigler and Chao Wu - District 9A
- State Senators Guy Guzzone - District 13
- State Senator Dr. Clarence Lam - District 12
- Congresswoman Sarah Elfreth - District 3
- Howard County Councilwoman Christiana Rigby- District 3

My career in national policy has trained me to develop evidence-based policy and manage large-scale budgets with transparency and measurable outcomes. My service on the OBRC and other HCPSS committees provides me with a technical, "day-one" understanding of our district's financial and policy landscape. Simultaneously, my leadership on the State's Hate Crime Response and Prevention Commission, the AAPI Commission and the Local Children's Board has prepared me to foster Unity across our diverse community. I am ready to turn community vision into actionable policy, ensuring HCPSS remains a world-class system that prepares every student for 21st-century success.

As a Howard County parent and a longtime community advocate, I have the hands-on experience to understand the daily needs of our families. Having lived on three continents as a student, parent, and policymaker, I bring a global perspective to prepare students for success in today's increasingly interconnected world. With my background as a policy expert and an executive with leadership experience at both the national and local levels, I am ready to lead. I will bring evidence-based decision-making to the Board to prioritize student well-being, academic excellence, and long-term fiscal success.

2. Are you participating in the Citizens Election Fund (CEF) public financing? Why or why not?

No because CEF public funding is only available to County Council and County Executive candidates.

3. What do you believe are the three most important issues currently facing the HCPSS? What are your plans to address these?

- 1) Sustainable funding and accountable resource allocation for transparency.

Our schools are being asked to do more with limited resources. This includes both the operating budget and capital funding. We need to prioritize student-facing positions—teachers, paraeducators, and student services—while also addressing deferred maintenance in our facilities so students and staff can learn and work in safe, well-maintained environments. At the same time, we need strong fiscal responsibility and

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accountability to ensure every dollar is used effectively and aligned with student needs. I would advocate

for stronger coordination with the County Executive and Council to ensure funding keeps pace with enrollment, service demands, and long-term infrastructure needs, while improving transparency and discipline in how resources are allocated.

2) High-quality education for all students.

Every student should have access to strong instruction, meaningful opportunities, and the support needed to succeed. This includes preparing students for college and careers, expanding access to rigorous and career-connected learning, and ensuring students are supported both academically and socially. I would focus on strengthening instruction, using data to identify and address gaps in outcomes, and aligning resources so all students can reach their full potential.

3) Address Workforce Shortages of teachers, educators, professional staff and substitute teachers in the School System: We want to make HCPSS a place where people want to build careers. That starts with competitive salaries, clear advancement pathways, and paid training and mentoring that help teachers, paraeducators, and support staff grow within the system. I'd also pursue creative recruitment strategies — partnering with local colleges for internship pipelines and opening flexible entry points for mid-career professionals and retirees transitioning into education. And underneath all of it, we need a work environment where staff feel genuinely heard through regular surveys and feedback channels, with that input shaping decisions on workload and resources. When employees feel valued, they stay — and that stability benefits every student.

4. The Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO) Review Committee, posted recommendations for changes to APFO in August of 2025. One of the suggested changes was the elimination of the temporary postponement of development projects in crowded school districts (for up to 4 years). Instead of the pauses, surcharge fee increases based on overcapacity amounts were proposed. Do you agree with replacing the pauses with larger fees? If so, do you believe the larger fees proposed are the right amount?

I understand the goal of the proposed change—to create a more predictable development process while still addressing school capacity. However, I do not support weakening APFO protections. School capacity constraints are real, and we must ensure that growth is aligned with our ability to provide high-quality learning environments.

The proposed fees do not fully offset the real impact that new development has on our schools, particularly given rising construction costs and the time required to build or expand facilities. Without meaningful safeguards, this approach risks increasing overcrowding and placing additional strain on students, educators, and school resources.

Impact fees can play a role, but they must be paired with responsible planning and clear accountability to ensure that capacity keeps pace with growth. In areas where schools are already over capacity, maintaining appropriate protections is important.

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Ultimately, we need a balanced approach that supports thoughtful growth while ensuring our school system is not overburdened.

5. What do you believe are the top financial priorities in the HCPSS budget, given so many competing needs for resources? If forced to make cuts, what areas do you think should be prioritized to not cut?

My top financial priorities in the HCPSS budget are protecting classroom positions, investing in programs with demonstrated impact on student outcomes, and strengthening special education, and mental health resources for both students and staff.

If forced to make cuts, my priority would be to protect classroom positions, student-facing programs and services, and critical supports such as special education, multilingual learner support, and mental health. Non-instructional savings should be phased in strategically through operational efficiencies, shared services, and delayed discretionary spending, so we minimize disruption to teaching and learning. At the same time, HCPSS should pursue every available competitive grant, including those for school safety, cybersecurity, and after-school enrichment, to fill gaps and maintain key initiatives.

However, the decisions to address these priorities won't happen in a vacuum. We need robust data, collaboration with our Superintendent and County leaders, and input from students, staff, parents, and community members to inform the work of HCPSS in these areas.

6. Howard County is not immune from the religious and ethnic division that has become a main concern across the country. Provide specifics for what you have done to bring people together.

One of my core priorities is "Unity" in our communities. This means bringing together families, educators, school staff, and community stakeholders to build trust, foster inclusion, and strengthen collaboration across our school system.

I have worked across communities to turn that goal into action. Through the Horizon Foundation's Equity Collaborative, I partnered with diverse community organizations to help propose changes and advocate for the revision of Policy 1080, strengthening how our school system approaches inclusion and student support.

In 2021, I served as a lead organizer of the Stop Asian Hate rally in Howard County, bringing together major organizations across racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. At a time of heightened tension, we created a space for solidarity, shared purpose, and community healing.

I have also been engaged in long-term community building. Since 2018, I have worked with partners across sectors to advance the vision of the Howard County AAPI Cultural Center—from initial concept to advocacy, securing state and local funding, and ultimately its grand opening in 2026. This effort brought together leaders and residents from many backgrounds to build something lasting for the entire community.

In addition, as Vice Chair of the Howard County Chinese School, I helped establish the BranchOut! program, which connects middle and high school student volunteers to provide tutoring through HCPSS's BSAP

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program and the Autism Society. This program not only supports students academically but also builds connections across communities and fosters mutual understanding among young people.

Across all this work, my focus has been the same: bringing people together, building relationships, and creating opportunities for collaboration. That is how we move forward as a stronger, more unified community.

7. Give three examples of HCPSS issues you have supported or opposed. Have you testified before the Board of Education in the past?

Yes, I have testified multiple times before the Board of Education since 2019 on key issues affecting students, educators, and our school system.

One recent example is my testimony on February 19, 2026, representing the Operating Budget Review Committee (OBRC). I recommended that the Board retain the 14.0 Full-Time Equivalent high school science paraeducator positions unless and until a clear, detailed implementation plan is presented demonstrating how laboratory safety, instructional quality, and teacher workload would be maintained without them. This recommendation was adopted by the BOE.

In 2025, I have publicly opposed proposed budget cuts to Gifted and Talented programs, including through an op-ed published in the *Baltimore Banner*. I believe these programs are not for a privileged few—they are essential in developing the next generation of thinkers, innovators, and problem-solvers, and should remain accessible to all students who can benefit from them.

Earlier, in 2020, I testified twice in support of revisions to Policy 1080, advocating for culturally relevant curriculum and strategies to strengthen the diversity of the teaching workforce. I believe these efforts are important in fostering understanding, reducing bias, and ensuring all students feel represented in their learning.

These experiences reflect my commitment to thoughtful, data-informed advocacy and to ensuring that Board decisions support both student success and a strong, well-supported school system.

8. How do you believe schools should be prioritized for capital improvement funding? What types of criteria do you believe are fair? How should the HCPSS handle the lack of resources available to keep all schools maintained?

Schools should be prioritized for capital improvement funding using a data-driven and transparent framework, and the HCPSS capital prioritization matrix is a good start towards this goal. I support prioritizing based on facility condition, including the State Facility Condition Index, deferred maintenance, maintenance tracking, and especially health and safety needs, which must always come first. Capacity and student experience should also be considered, with equity as a lens to ensure all students have access to safe and functional learning environments.

Fair criteria are those that are objective, consistently applied, and clearly communicated. Using standardized measures—such as facility condition data, maintenance history, and documented safety

needs—helps ensure that decisions are based on real conditions rather than perception. The criteria should remain transparent, consistent, and clearly communicated, so families understand how schools are prioritized and trust the process.

Given limited resources, HCPSS should take a disciplined, multi-year approach to capital planning. This means leveraging existing resources—including the capital budget, routine maintenance funding, facilities staff expertise, and the prioritization matrix—while strengthening accountability in how funds are used. Life safety and health issues must be prioritized, and we should invest more in lifecycle planning and preventive maintenance for major systems like HVAC and roofs, as well as addressing deferred maintenance earlier to avoid higher costs later.

We may not be able to address every need at once, but with a data-driven, transparent, and forward-looking approach, we can make fair decisions that improve conditions across all schools over time.

9. What can the HCPSS do to compete with other school systems to obtain experienced teachers and staff?

We must address the shortages of teachers, support staff, bus drivers, and substitutes because they are the backbone to what helps ensure student success. Competing for talent requires more than pay alone. It calls for a workplace where staff feel respected, supported, and proud to serve.

Recent position cuts, including teacher and support staff reductions in FY25 and FY26, have negatively affected morale and retention. When dedicated educators see positions eliminated, it creates uncertainty and makes it harder to recruit and keep experienced staff. We need stable, predictable funding and long-term workforce planning to rebuild trust and stability.

My priorities are to:

- Ensure competitive compensation and benefits: Advocate for fair salaries, steps, and benefits that reflect rising costs and reward experience. HCPSS has been proactive in meeting the Blueprint's salary targets, which helps with recruitment. But to remain competitive, especially for experienced educators, we must also focus on retention.
- Improve working conditions and strengthen career pathways. Larger class sizes and reduced support staff contribute to burnout, so we must prioritize adequate staffing—including paraeducators and student services—so teachers can focus on instruction. At the same time, we should expand mentoring, certification support, and leadership development, and create clear advancement pathways so educators and staff can grow and build their careers within HCPSS.
- Recruit talent creatively: Partner with local colleges to build internship and training pipelines that make HCPSS a top choice for graduates, and open flexible pathways for mid-career professionals, including federal and private-sector workers, to transition into education. In addition, HCPSS can leverage Howard County's growing population of retired or semi-retired professionals with deep expertise by creating flexible pathways for them to serve as substitute teachers, tutors, mentors, and part-time instructional support staff. With the right onboarding and training, mid-career professionals and retirees

can help address staffing shortages while bringing valuable real-world experience into our schools.

- Improve hiring timelines and workforce planning. HCPSS often hires later than neighboring districts due to the budget cycle, putting us at a disadvantage. We should explore ways to provide earlier hiring signals and more predictable staffing plans.

### 10. How would you improve support of Special Education programs?

HCPSS educators are deeply committed to serving students with disabilities, but the system faces persistent challenges — high caseloads, shortages of certified special education teachers and paraeducators, and increasing student needs. The state's Special Education Workgroup and Least Restrictive Environment reports make clear that staffing shortages, paperwork burden, and limited inclusion supports are key barriers to effective service delivery. These pressures also contribute to burnout and turnover, creating a cycle that affects students, teachers, and families alike.

To address these challenges, I would focus on four priorities:

- **Stabilize and strengthen the workforce:** Implement targeted recruitment and retention strategies, including paid training pathways for paraeducators to earn certification, hard-to-staff stipends for special education teachers, and partnerships with local universities to expand the pipeline.
- **Reduce caseloads and administrative load:** Streamline paperwork and data systems, consolidate progress reporting, and pilot tools, including secure, teacher-guided AI tools to handle repetitive documentation tasks so educators can focus on instruction.
- **Improve inclusion and collaboration:** Ensure general and special educators have protected co-planning time, strengthen behavioral and mental-health supports by expanding access to Board Certified Behavior Analysts, Registered Behavior Technicians, and school counselors, and broaden professional learning on co-teaching and evidence-based practices.
- **Revisit Maryland's funding formula for special education:** Ensure that staffing and services match the actual level of student need in each school. With stable staffing, meaningful planning time, and strong instructional support, we can deliver high-quality services in the least restrictive environment and help every child reach their full potential.

### 11. The HCPSS budget has ever-increasing needs, and over time has not been fully funded. What ideas do you have to help improve student outcomes given the limited resources directly available to support student needs?

HCPSS faces growing needs with limited resources, so we must be strategic, disciplined, and focused on what drives student outcomes.

- First, we need to prioritize resources where they have the greatest impact. That means protecting student-facing positions—teachers, paraeducators, and student services—and aligning resources with instructional needs. Not every program has the same impact, so we should use data to evaluate what works and focus on what most improves teaching and learning.

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- Second, we should use existing resources more effectively. This includes better coordination across programs, reducing inefficiencies, and strengthening accountability so that funding decisions are clearly tied to outcomes.
- Third, we need to invest upstream. Early intervention—whether through academic support, student services, or targeted programs—can prevent more costly challenges later and improve long-term outcomes.
- Fourth, we should leverage additional resources and partnerships to expand support for students without relying solely on the school system's budget. This includes pursuing competitive grants—such as those for school safety, cybersecurity, and after-school programs—and building partnerships with local businesses, healthcare providers, and higher education institutions to expand learning opportunities and support career pathways.
- Finally, we must continue to advocate for stable, long-term funding at the county, state, and federal levels, while being transparent with the community about trade-offs and priorities.

By staying focused on impact, accountability, and long-term planning, we can protect high-quality education, sustain essential programs, and keep student learning at the center of every decision—even in a constrained fiscal environment.

12. In the past, the Operating Budget Review Committee (OBRC) has been tasked with reviewing only specific areas of the budget by Board of Education members. Currently, the OBRC reviews the entire budget. Which process do you prefer and why? Include how you believe the recommendations may better result in changes to the budget, in your answer.

I prefer the current approach where the OBRC reviews the entire budget.

A comprehensive review allows the Committee to understand how different parts of the budget fit together and to evaluate trade-offs across the system. Focusing only on selected areas can miss important connections and limits the ability to identify system-wide priorities and efficiencies.

Reviewing the full budget also strengthens transparency and accountability. It ensures that recommendations are grounded in a complete understanding of resource allocation, rather than a partial view.

To make OBRC recommendations more impactful, I believe three things are important. First, there should be clear alignment between OBRC recommendations and Board priorities early in the process, so that feedback can meaningfully inform decision-making rather than come too late. Second, recommendations should be specific, data-driven, and tied to student outcomes, which makes them more actionable. Finally, there should be a clear feedback loop—with the Board explicitly responding to OBRC recommendations. This helps ensure that the Committee's work leads to real consideration and, where appropriate, changes in the budget.

A comprehensive, transparent process, combined with stronger alignment and follow-through, will make OBRC recommendations more effective and more likely to influence budget decisions.