

**Washington County Teachers Association  
Washington County Educational Support Personnel**

**2018 Board of County Commissioners  
Candidate Questionnaire**

CANDIDATE: Ed Forrest

OFFICE SOUGHT: County Commissioner

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I confirm that the responses provided here are my official positions in seeking local office and I understand that WCTA reserves the right to share my responses with members and interested parties.

CANDIDATE SIGNATURE: W. Gilbert Forrest DATE SUBMITTED: 8-9-18

Candidates: In order to be considered for a recommendation, you must indicate your response to each of the questions. Clarifications, explanations, and other information may be attached, but please be certain to indicate clearly the questions(s) to which you refer. Please return your completed and signed questionnaire to WCTA.

## Education Funding

### Background Points

- In 2002, lawmakers passed the Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act (also known as the Thornton Plan) based on the recommendations of the Thornton Commission. While this increased investment has helped Maryland's public schools and students achieve outstanding results and develop a reputation as a national leader, many unmet needs remain.
- The cost of educating students continues to increase. Over the last 10 years, Maryland has seen an increase in our Title I student population of 129% and limited English proficiency students of 88%. With year-to-year increases in special education needs, it is clear that the changing student population is a significant driver of costs.
- Maryland had the best schools in the nation for five years in a row from 2009 to 2013, according to *Education Week*. In 2016, *Ed Week* ranked Maryland fifth in the nation. Maryland now ranks 2nd in AP performance (2017)—after leading the nation for ten consecutive years—with 30.4 percent of Maryland graduates scoring a 3 or better on AP assessments. And Maryland's graduation rate is at 87 percent—the highest ever in the state and 3.8 percent higher than the national graduation rate.
- There is a critical need for improvement in closing education gaps, expanding programs and services, community schools, and improving student achievement.
- The governor will have a significant impact on the future funding and success of Maryland schools. Maryland's median incomes are the highest in the nation, but school spending is the 10th highest among the states and 16th highest when adjusted for regional cost differences. According to consultants hired by MSDE, Maryland schools are now underfunded by nearly \$3 billion annually. That means each of our schools, on average, is underfunded by more than \$2 million every year.
- MSEA supports legislation to update our school funding formula and policies to ensure adequate and equitable state and local education funding. Our priorities include elevating the respect and support for Maryland's educators with higher salaries and greater career opportunities, and addressing Maryland's economic inequality in our schools with programs to target concentrated poverty.

1. Please provide your general and specific thoughts on how the county can address the unmet needs facing our schools. Detail how you would prioritize aid for education in your budget deliberations.

I served on the BOE 2000-2012 and saw first hand the shift in funding. I feel the county took advantage (in a negative way) the increase in state funding as a means to under fund WCPs. The County share continues to shrink and we've mislabeled it as "low effort". I believe funding the public schools should be a top priority for the county and involve multiple meetings with WCPs, BOE and stakeholders to understand critical funding needs.

2. There is considerable room for improvement in addressing educator recruitment and retention. Across the state, educator salaries have been relatively flat for the last eight years. Pension benefits have been reduced but employee contributions have increased. Class sizes will increase as a result of cost-cutting measures and/or due to hiring freezes, layoffs, and retirements. Support personnel positions have been eliminated. How will you address critical concerns with educator recruitment and retention?

Recruits, Reward, Retain. This is not my original idea but served on a BOE that made great strides in increasing salary and professional opportunities. The county could financially support an investment in teachers

3. Do you support or oppose Maryland's maintenance of effort law that requires local jurisdictions to fund at least the same per pupil allocation in local aid for education as the prior year unless a waiver is granted?

Support

Oppose

Additional Comments:

I would support the elimination of the waiver as an option for county governments.

## Public Funding for Private Schools

### *Background Points*

- WCTA believes any education dollars spent outside of improving public schools makes it harder to make the progress necessary to provide a world-class education for every student.
- The Maryland State Department of Education requires a certificate of approval or registration for private schools; it does not accredit or license them. Private schools do not have to report or administer teacher qualifications, class sizes, adherence to College and Career State Standards, student retention rates, graduation rates, demographics, or discipline or suspension policies. Without these measures, it is impossible to ascertain the standards to evaluate any of the funded programs funneling public tax dollars to private schools.
- Carroll County Commissioners created a \$400,000 "Educational Opportunities Fund" to enhance and enrich the educational opportunities for home- and private-schooled students. WCTA is opposed to this type of diversion of public funding with no accountability.

4. Do you support or oppose allocating public funding to home and privately schooled students?

Support

Oppose

Additional Comments:

## Collective Bargaining

### *Background Points*

- WCTA supports efforts to protect and enhance the collective bargaining rights.
- Collective bargaining is the negotiation of a contract – including wages, salary scale, benefits, and working conditions – between employers and employees. The items agreed to in a ratified collective bargaining agreement apply to all employees in a bargaining unit, providing a benefit to employees and employers in not having to negotiate thousands of individual contracts.

5. Do you support or oppose public education employees' rights to bargain collectively?

Support

Oppose

Additional Comments:

## Parental Involvement and Public Support

### Background Points

- It is calculated that school age children spend 70% of their waking hours (including weekends and holidays) outside of school.
- Research shows that the most consistent predictors of children's academic achievement and social adjustment are parental involvement in schools and parental expectations of the child's academic attainment and satisfaction with their child's education at school.
- Additionally, research indicates there are three major factors that influence parental involvement in schools:
  - Parents' belief that they can impact what is important, necessary on behalf of their children school;
  - The extent to which parents believe that they can have a positive influence on their children's education; and
  - Parents' perceptions that their children and school want them to be involved.

6. What would you do to increase parental involvement and public support for our public schools and educators?

*As a County Commissioner I would be a strong advocate for WPS. The public school system is the backbone of our community and should be highlighted and celebrated at every opportunity.*

## Community Schools

### *Background Points*

- Poverty dramatically and negatively affects the wellbeing of children, particularly in the areas of physical health, mental health, safe housing, access to technology, parental support, family planning services and education, youth employment, and nutrition. Each of these factors play a large role in whether students are able to learn and do well in school—making it imperative that these opportunity gaps be closed if we want to provide equitable education in our communities. According to the data collected by MSDE, 44% of Maryland public school students were enrolled for free and reduced price meals this school year (at or below 185% of poverty).
- WCTA supports the establishment of community schools, where applicable, which are designed to close these opportunity gaps by making the school a hub for essential services that students in disadvantaged communities lack.
- Community schools generally have the following four components: (1) they serve a high concentration of students in poverty; (2) they employ a full-time coordinator to lead community school-related services; (3) they conduct a needs assessment to identify key obstacles to learning and the services needed to close the opportunity gaps; and (4) they work with community partners to bring those needed services into the school building or nearby locations to make them accessible to students and community members.
- WCTA supports equitable and adequate resources to provide every student with an opportunity to learn in a safe and non-disruptive environment. Establishing and funding community schools is a research based strategy for closing opportunity gaps and building strong communities.

7. Do you support or oppose local efforts to create and support community schools in areas of concentrated poverty?

Support

Oppose

Additional Comments:

# Privatization

## Background Points

- WCTA opposes any effort to outsource or privatize education jobs that are part of a bargaining unit. We maintain that any attempt to outsource or privatize jobs of public educators violates collective bargaining agreements because such an effort is in essence terminating or firing bargaining unit positions.
- Outsourcing and privatization efforts have threatened teacher and education support professional (ESP) jobs for years. Just in the last three years, Anne Arundel County has attempted to outsource teaching services for deaf and blind students, Talbot County has discussed privatizing transportation services, and Kent County has attempted to privatize custodial services. There currently is a multi-county effort on the Eastern Shore to outsource the hiring of occupational therapists and physical therapists to work in the schools.
- When jobs are outsourced, quality control is diminished and safety is compromised. Public employees are subject to background checks that private employers often skip. After privatizing, local school boards lose control over the individuals working in schools and have little ability to provide input on job performance.
- Privateers often use an argument of cost-savings as a means of winning contracts. The amount is often misleading because they low-ball the first year operating costs. Ultimately, they reduce hours, health care coverage, or just cut jobs. All of these steps lead to increased local unemployment and less overall money in the community.

8. Are you in favor of contracting out custodial, cafeteria, and maintenance services rather than have those services provided by Board of Education employees?

Support

Oppose

Additional Comments:



## Essay Questions

A. What are the top three things you would like to accomplish in the next four years if you are elected to Washington County Board of County Commissioners?

1. Economic Development → Expand tax base  
I will advocate for an independent economic development commissioner with the ability to recruit new businesses and assist existing businesses to improve job opportunities which will grow the tax base to support county services.
2. Support Public Education to prepare Washington County students for a productive life.
3. Work with federal, state and local agencies to combat the opioid epidemic through education and treatment.

B. What is your view of the current local tax structure? What, if any, changes would you advocate?

I support expanding the tax base through economic development and education. While taxes are necessary for supporting public services, I strongly support growing the local economy as a positive means to increased funding.

