



Citizens for Wayne Keefer
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www.WayneKeefer.com
Authority: Tracy L. Salvagno, Treasurer

August 13, 2018

Washington County Teachers Association
Washington County Education Support Personnel
18047 Oak Ridge Drive
Hagerstown, MD 21740

Dear Mr. Becker, Ms. Hines, and Mr. Farr:

Please find enclosed my response to the joint WCTA/WCESP Candidate Questionnaire.

As someone involved in teaching myself, albeit as an adjunct at the college level, I share in the same appreciate for quality education as I know you do.

I look forward to hearing from you soon regarding an interview

All the best,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Wayne Keefer". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Wayne Keefer
cell: 240-643-6735 (call or text)
home: 301-678-6457

Washington County Teachers Association
Washington County Educational Support Personnel

2018 Board of County Commissioners
Candidate Questionnaire

CANDIDATE: Wayne Keefer

OFFICE SOUGHT: Washington County Commission

CAMPAIGN ADDRESS: Citizens for Wayne Keefer,

PO Box 2751, Hagerstown, MD 21740

PHONE NUMBER(S): Cell - 240-643-6735

EMAIL: VoteKeefer@gmail.com

WEBSITE: www.WayneKeefer.com

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: Wayne K Keefer DATE SUBMITTED: 8/13/2018

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 believe that while the Washington County Board of Education does an admirable job serving our students, many needs still remain unmet. School safety is one area which has seen great strides in recent years, with more still left to do. I publicly called for a special task force to examine the cost side of school safety, which resulted in an additional contribution of \$1 million to help build school vestibules where they lacked. Also, at our State-of-the-County, I spoke in support of expanding Pre-K. I also helped to lead an effort to redirect savings elsewhere in the county budget which equated to the BOE's budget line item for Pre-K expansion in more schools. Although Pre-K has been expanded, the programming is still limited in the number of students who can enroll. I will continue to advocate to expand Pre-K education within the county's budget.

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?

To be fair, reduction in retirement benefits and flat salaries has become common in many industries, not just education. Most of this is due to the economic malaise of recent years. However, not all careers see the cascading effect of layoffs, reduction in extracurricular activities, and increasing class sizes that burdens such an important customer base—our students. To recruit the best talent takes an attractive salary. Just as the business sector claims “you get what you pay for,” the same holds true for educator pay. When pay makes a job worth applying for, recruiters generally have an expanded selection of applicants. For the commissioner’s role in recruiting school employees, we need to ensure other services within the community are robust and jobs readily available, so the non-teacher spouse also has an opportunity to find great employment in our county.

With regards to retention and what the county could offer, I believe we can be creative, and offer benefits such as down payment assistance on homes, or property tax credits like has been approved at the state level for first responders. Both would encourage employees to not only work in Washington County, but to live here as well, and at a cost savings for the employee. We have in our community colleges that offer Education related degrees from Associate to Doctorate. Might it be reasonable to suggest that because of our continued support of these institutions of higher learning, a certain number of courses be allotted to Board of Education employees at a reduced or no cost—so that we can help to further the education of our educators?

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 support what maintenance of effort strives to accomplish, in that it attempts to prevent downward swings in local funding for education. That’s because inconsistent funding would severely disrupt the school board’s budget and planning priorities. However, in addition to loopholes which some counties take advantage of, MOE creates an artificial minimum standard to which it seems counties strive for. While changes to MOE is not a local commissioner decision, I believe maintenance of effort could instead be tied to county revenues, where a percentage of county revenues is guaranteed to education—one of the most important functions of local government.

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:

I support parents who choose to home school or send their children to private schools if that's what they desire. However, because public schools have standards not required of all private schools, funding to public schools is vetted through the standards and accreditation required of the public school system. In other words, it's almost as if public school funding comes with a built in audit. That's a good thing.

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:

I support the collective bargaining rights of public education employees. First of all, collective bargaining provides efficiency and fairness to employees. Secondly, having been involved now with government employees for a few years, I have seen past examples of how employees can be treated unfairly when management creates cliques and favors some over other well deserving employees. Such unions strive to create opportunity that is equal to everyone.

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?

I have been a licensed foster parent in Washington County for about five years, and during this time have cared for a total of eight children in my home. In particular with the early school aged kids, I could tell how behind they were in their education compared to what is "typical" for a child that age. This was no doubt due to some lack of parental involvement. So the question of increasing parental involvement, I believe, is an important ingredient to a well-rounded education.

How to do that? As schools are built and remodeled, I believe we should consider ways to have the school become an integral part of the local community. Can schools be built to accommodate a public facility, like a community gym that can be used after school and in the summer by approved groups? We also need to promote those extracurricular activities, such as sports, band, and civic clubs that engage students and their parents year round. All of these activities would keep students and parents involved in the school system more often.

When I was in school, up until middle school, my mother would frequently come into my classroom as a parent just to observe. A few times she would also have lunch with me. I hope my mother is not the exception in regard to her level of involvement, but her exceptional effort certainly has had a positive impact on me. I am interested in seeking more opportunities to engage parents.

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:

I strongly support community schools throughout Washington County, especially in areas with high poverty rates. Schools can serve many functions within a community, purposes such as economic drivers which include the training and education provided to students, to the employment opportunities for teachers and staff. Schools also are a sense of great pride in smaller communities.

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:

I do believe it to be in the best interest of the employees and the community for all education jobs to be hired employees of the school system. First of all, the school system can ensure adequate background checks on employees interacting with children that private contractors may not follow as precisely. Secondly, many contracted cleaning companies might not use local workers. Employing local workers adds to the sense of community we believe to be a vital attribute schools provide to communities, especially low income communities. Finally, when employees report to an onsite supervisor, more communication occurs resulting in greater productivity—a good thing for taxpayer dollars.

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?

Safe Communities – I believe an important function of county government is public safety. This extends into the classroom. As I already mentioned, I helped to secure \$1 million in capital funds within the county budget to build security vestibules. I would also support additional funding for school resource officers. I've also worked with the Sheriff and four small communities without a police force (Keedysville, Sharpsburg, Clear Spring and Williamsport) to add a community deputy to be shared within these towns, at the towns expense but with the patrol car and supplies covered by the county. Three of these communities have schools—all have students.

Responsible Spending – I believe tax dollars should be spent wisely. The taxpayers in this county include the parents, teachers, and staff of the school system. Together, I believe, the Board of County Commissioners and Board of Education can continue to provide a world class education system while being efficient with tax dollars. I have supported additional funding to education—and will do so when we can leverage tax dollars efficiently.

Stronger Ethics in Government – I believe public officials should be held to a higher standard than is currently required. Until a recent vote to change county policy, county commissioners were not covered under the county's harassment policy. So, employees were held to a higher standard than elected officials. I have also called for our ethics ordinance to expand and cover issues such as harassment and breaches of confidentiality. Currently, the ethics ordinance only covers financial gain for county commissioners. There is not methodology in place to properly reprimand poor ethical behavior of a public official unless financial gain is involved.

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

I do not believe that raising tax rates is necessary. I believe that we need to work to increase the tax base. Increasing tax base—growing jobs, building more homes and businesses offers more taxing opportunities, and creates a more stable revenue stream in times of economic decline. If a small tax base were simply taxed higher in good times, then in bad times there is still a small tax base from which to gain tax revenues.