

NOTE: The following responses were submitted to the WCTA in an email rather than on the questionnaire form. The responses to the questions have been transcribed as submitted.

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Treasurer: Brock Marquis

I am aware that responses will be archived and shared publicly.

1.

I am a candidate for the Board of Education because of my desire to ensure that every child receives the highest quality education possible.

What makes me a suitable candidate is my experience as a manager dealing with employees. Many of whom had recently graduated from public school. I am familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of public school graduates and how they have changed over time.

Also, as a financial advisor it is part of my job to be aware of the changing needs of the current economy and the skills and character traits that will be required in the future economy.

Lastly, is my experience with the needs of various student groups. I was a student who had severe dyslexia and went through the special ed program. Whereas my son and daughter were in our county's accelerated programs from second grade through 12th grade. Additionally, I have family members who had to enter the public schools as English learners. Those experiences capture the range of situations that take up a great deal of the Board's time and resources.

2.

I attended Southern Illinois University for Health Care Administration, although I did not complete my degree.

I served in the US Navy at the Bethesda Medical Center, after which my family and I moved to Hagerstown. Since then I have been an insurance agent, a Bank branch manager, and since 2009, a financial advisor.

My volunteerism has included church activities, food banks and being a facilitator for a domestic violence prevention program.

3.

Maintenance of effort means that at least the same amount of dollars spent per pupil in the previous year, will be spent by the county the next year. That is a concept that should not change whether we are in good or bad economic times. In that sense I would be against waving maintenance of effort.

4.

In the last year I have not been in any of the schools. However, since August of last year I have been at all but two board meetings.

5.

Recruiting and retaining employees is amongst the most important responsibilities of the board. It is important to note that at the Board of Education debate at HCC several months ago. That two of the candidates, one of whom is a prior WCPS teacher, and the other who is an educator outside of WCPS. Both commented that pay is not the reason for our county's issues with recruitment and retention.

That has been my observation as well. As part of my professional activities I deal with a large number of teachers and administrators in seven school districts across three states. The only group of teachers I deal with who mention pay as a problem, are those in West Virginia.

However, what teachers and administrators across all school districts routinely discuss, are the issues with administrative tasks that are unrelated to the quality of a student's education, as well as their powerlessness to deal with misbehaving students. To the point that other students and in some cases themselves, are turned into victims of violent or verbally abusive students.

I believe that it is necessary for the policies that have created those situations to be changed. In order for that to happen we need board of education members who will speak loudly about those issues. I am running in order to be one of those board members.

If common sense regarding administrative tasks and behavioral standards can be returned to our schools, I am confident that the quality of life and rewarding career that come with being a public school teacher, will greatly ease our recruitment and retention issues.

6.

The higher than average rate of inflation in the cost of healthcare has been occurring since before I began my studies in healthcare administration in 1995. And because of the demographics of baby boomers, that trend is not due to change for another 20 years.

There are however, various steps that have helped to control healthcare costs. One is to self insure, if that is an option for WCPS. A second could be to become part of a larger buying group such as being combined with county employees.

However, I would imagine those options have already been carefully looked at and continue to be reviewed. Ultimately, the only solution to lowering healthcare costs long-term, comes in the form of increasing the health of employees. Fortunately, there are a lot of productive ways to do that, which come with other benefits as well. I would like to see a program in our schools where health education and living a healthy lifestyle becomes part of the culture of WCPS.

I would like to have team leaders in each school that organizes events such as healthy potluck days, walking, or other low impact exercises during teacher's breaks. Workout clubs during evenings or weekends. Ultimately, those are the activities that improve health, lower healthcare costs, increase the overall quality of life of our employees, and make working at WCPS a more enjoyable and community building experience.

7.

My three priorities would be:

One, recruitment and retention. Two, eliminating needless administrative tasks and giving teachers and administrators the ability to protect students and themselves from violent or verbally abusive students.

Those first two I discussed previously. My third priority is to ensure the classic education of our students. Reading and math scores have been trending down nationally for many years. However, the pace of the drop has been occurring faster in recent years. The danger is that the subjects of classic education have not been chosen randomly. Throughout the centuries these are the subjects that best provide children with the tools to achieve their dreams, and to improve the quality of life for future generations.

8.

That is a difficult question, because I am quite impressed by how much thought has gone into every aspect of the public schools as it relates to students and employees. I would say that the top unmet need is how legislators and policy makers at the state and federal level do not understand the effect that their laws and regulations have in the classroom.

9.

That is another difficult question. We have so many quality programs, that we have trouble filling some of them with enough students, such as our agricultural program. If there are programs that have lost enough interest, then it may be time to replace them.

I think it would be worthwhile to look into programs for students that have not shown an interest in what comes after high school, which helps them connect their interests to various career paths.

10.

The volume of non-instructional work is one of the largest impediments to providing students a quality education, as well as recruitment and retention. Prospective teachers are aware of the frustration caused by non-instructional administrative tasks and it impacts the quality of life for our current teachers.

The solution is two fold. One, is the board needs to instruct the superintendent to take every measure possible to reduce needless administrative tasks. A superintendent and administration that has the support of the board, has much more flexibility than a superintendent whose actions will not be defended by the board.

The other half of the solution comes from a board that will not allow legislators and regulators to remain ignorant of the conditions in the classroom and what is required to improve those conditions.

11.

Just as it is the responsibility of the board to ensure that legislators understand the practical effects of their decisions. It is also the responsibility of the board to ensure that county commissioners understand the needs of the public schools.

The problem as it relates to our board and our commissioners, is how adversarial the relationship has become. Our county commissioners care deeply about the welfare of our students. However, they are responsible for balancing all the needs of the community. They have already let road maintenance fall behind by more than 10 years in order to maximize funding for other needs. They see the cost of public safety continuing to rise at an unsustainable rate. Additionally, they fund the community college, which

also provides AP and IB level classes and teaches career skills, at a fraction of what we cost the community to teach those same skills.

There are astronomical benefits to having high school students performing at an AP and IB level, or graduating with career ready skills. However, it is not productive to insist that ours is the best way to do it (even though I do believe that providing those opportunities at the high school level is the best way to do it), and then accuse the county commissioners of negligence because they don't fund our priorities over the community's other priorities.

We need board members who can talk with the county commissioners and not frustrate them to the point of tuning out.

12.

Privatizing various functions is not a clear-cut yes/no determination. Privatization is not always an attempt to save money. It is a function of the fact that there is a limit to how many skills a management team can know and increase the effectiveness of. Therefore, using a company that specializes in that area and letting them manage the services, can lead to improved outcomes. In that sense I am open to the idea of privatization.

I do not have a preconception that privatization is superior and I am aware of the marketing gimmicks that contractors will use to sell their products, or the games played in the wording of contracts.

A hard line when it comes to privatization is that teachers, tutors, counselors and administrators must always be direct employees of the public school system.

13.

This is issue #1, #2 and #3. If this issue is resolved, then every other issue falls into place with much greater ease. For example, if there were enough positively engaged parents, they would be the ones demanding full-funding for the budget.

However, the gulf between parents and the public school system has never been wider and it continues to grow. I place part of the blame at the feet of parents. Homeschooling and private school parents have withdrawn from the public education process.

In recent years we have added apathy on the part of many public school parents. I was shocked to learn that parent-teacher conferences have been canceled because it got to the point that in many classes, there were only a few parents coming in on conference days.

However, these problems are not one-sided. Various groups in the school system have played a role in promoting disengagement.

Looking locally over the past year, it began with a last minute change to the masking policy right before the school year started. No warning, no discussion. That shakes the confidence that parents have in the school system, when their local BOE does something so obviously intended to avoid interaction with the community.

When the National School Board Association declared that parents who speak at school boards should be investigated as domestic terrorists, we have to be honest with ourselves. That kills trust in the public schools.

Where was our BOE and teachers association's outrage to what was one of the darkest moments in America's Public School history? What other conclusion could parents come to, other than public school entity's, even here in Washington County, truly view them as adversaries? Which is certainly going to show up as even more parents taking their children to where parents are not viewed as adversaries. Or, it will lead to the parents who do remain, to become even more disengaged. It's the wrong response, but an understandable one.

Then there are the issues with the library books, the 3R curriculum being added to the 6th grade in an even more manipulative manner than the change in masking policy was implemented. Or, the community being cut off from the superintendent selection process.

The way to get parents re-engaged in the public schools comes in several steps.

One, the BOE and teachers association has to make it obvious that we recognize that we are agents in the education process and that parents are the principals. We are not coparents, we do not define morality to their children, and we are not pioneers of a new view of society.

The superintendent listening sessions is a great idea and it should be done annually.

The Board should highlight the PTAs in a similar way that it highlights staff at the board meetings.

Additionally, we have to be fully transparent at the BOE. No more middle of the night policy changes, no more unannounced changes to curriculum, because we know parents will react negatively to it.

14.

The input of teachers is invaluable. The most successful organizations have as a core principle, that they make decisions based heavily off of the input of employees. No one has a better understanding of the effects of a decision than the employees. A culture of employee input is also great for morale and team building. Employee input can come in the form of focus groups, committee assignments and surveys.

15.

I do believe that tax dollars should follow the child. Therefore, if a parent feels that their child will receive a better education in a private school, then that tuition should be paid through tax dollars.

However, there does need to be a formula where only enough tax dollars are taken out of the public schools that it does not cause a reduction in facilities or staff to the point that if students come back to the public schools, it forces a large investment in order to handle the number of returning students.

16.

I do believe that BOE members should be included in important negotiations.

17.

Some of the features of blueprint for Maryland's success that are positive are the following:

Early childhood education, as well as the college and career readiness programs for 11th and 12th grades. The tutoring and alternative education approaches for students in kindergarten through 10th grade. An awareness of the benefits of social and emotional learning and restorative practices as well as engaging with the community, are all positives.

Some of the weaknesses are the following:

The focus on diverse teachers. My family is multiracial and the idea of diversity and inclusion is a hallmark of my life. However, the practical application of diversity and hiring practices in other school districts that I have seen, has led to racist hiring practices. Additionally, the idea that a child needs to see a certain # of teachers of their own race, is in itself a racist concept.

While I listed the focus on social and emotional learning and restorative practices as a strength, I would also list it as a weakness. The reason is that it is being relied upon as a solution to the increasing violence and behavioral issues of students. The reality is that I was in a school that instituted social and emotional learning and restorative practices beginning in 1988. While those experiences continue to benefit me, they were not a solution to behavioral issues.

When you look at the school districts that have pinned their hopes on those ideas, their behavior issues have continued to worsen, and that is not going to change. The blueprint's emphasis on restorative practices takes the focus off of what needs to be done to restore the good behavior that has been the hallmark of America's public schools for over 200 years. And without that foundation, no amount of money or planning will prevent the education process from becoming increasingly difficult.

18.

I began attending a community school in 1981, and it was a positive experience.

I do believe that the rollout of community schools needs to be done pragmatically and we need to be able to see an increase in academic performance in order to show the benefit of expanding the program. My primary concern with community schools is that the blueprint's vision for community schools has everything being run by the school system. Which will have the unintended consequence of pushing out nonprofit organizations.

The danger in that, is that the public schools are not the owners of the best ideas and we do not have the skills to do everything the best. We need other organizations that have their own culture and way of doing things, to be included, in order to maximize the benefit to children. In other words, including existing community resources in the community schools, is going to be a significant determinant of how successful it will be.

19.

Mental health is a serious issue. Coming from a family of mental health professionals, where my aunt was a psychologist and my uncle was a psychiatrist, who were contributors to California's public school mental health standards. I have a somewhat different perspective on the mental health crisis.

I do believe that we should have school counselors at a ratio of 1 for every 300 students. I believe that staff should be trained in restorative practices, and I am supportive of community schools as a positive mental health activity for many students.

However, none of those measures, even cumulatively, are a silver bullet solution. It is however, the best we can do in the context of mental health for students at this time.

In regards to staff, I am not opposed to increased services. However, we have to acknowledge that mental health has gotten increased funding and been used more frequently throughout society, for more than 20 years. And during that time mental illness has been continuously increasing. To the point that beginning in 2012, the rates of all mental health illnesses, with suicide as a particular standout, began increasing at an even faster pace than the previous rate of increase.

The issue is that we have raised the expectations of mental health services to something that they were never intended nor able to achieve. We have come to view mental health services as being like a doctor, who does surgery to remove cancer and the patient is healed. The reality is that mental health services such as counseling and medications, are more like a doctor taking an x-ray and putting a cast over a broken bone. The bone is only going to heal if the patient changes the lifestyle that caused the injury in the first place. They will also need to take additional steps needed to heal. Such as diet, physical therapy, etc.

In regards to those lifestyle changes in a mental health context. As many mental health professionals have said "America is not suffering from an epidemic increase in psychiatric illness. America is suffering from an epidemic decrease in connections, commonly agreed values, a shared vision and mission. " In other words, funding mental health services has a limit, at which point the benefit greatly diminishes. However, in the workplace, an effective way of dealing with mental health issues can come from investments in camaraderie and team building.

Going back to the dramatic increase in mental illness that began in 2012, what else occurred that year? That is the year that social media went mainstream. And social media can only function from people not spending time together, and highlighting our small number of differences with neon lights, while hiding from each other, our numerous similarities.

20.

I do not support a permanent virtual school in the sense that we would create a second school system for parents that want to keep their children at home. The experience of in person interaction with peers and teamwork is a vital part of the public school experience, and that is where resources should be spent. However, there is room to look at virtual school being used for students who are out sick.

21.

It is an absolute that teachers, administrators, counselors and tutors must be direct employees of the public schools. Outsourcing personnel leads to a direct loss of control of the culture of that group of employees as well as a degree of control over performance. As discussed previously, I can see the possibility of benefits for non-student facing personnel to be outsourced. However, there is a distinction and in my view it is an uncrossable line.

22.

The idea of teachers encouraging critical thinking by using professional autonomy is based on the same concept as tenured professors in higher education.

However, there is a reason that for the centuries that K-12 education and higher education have existed, that the concept of molding or challenging a student's perspective has been in the realm of higher education, only.

The reason is that children have to go through the process of developing their own perspective before they are able to benefit from exploring other perspectives.

The development of personal perspective occurs in childhood by learning facts and having experiences. A child has to play music and has to struggle with learning math concepts in order to maximize the brain development that enables personal perspective to best occur. They have to receive instruction in reading comprehension, in order to accurately understand other people's perspectives. Then they have to learn how to express their own thoughts through the written word. A child has to learn the facts of history in order to begin to understand the flow of human decisions.

In other words, children need to learn the facts of classic education for them to have the foundation to develop their own perspective, before the process of learning other perspectives can benefit them. Which is why the concept of tenured professors teaching the truth in higher-education, exists for after that foundation has been established.

If K-12 educators attempt to teach a child their perspective, then we are just teaching children to look to others for answers, because we have denied them the tools with which to explore and understand the world.

23.

As I mentioned in a previous question, I do not see where WCPS is failing in the areas of diversity, equity and inclusion. The students in our schools have equal access to tutors, counselors and additional resources.

It appears to me that the issue is that even though students have equal access to resources, there are various groups of students that continue to underperform academically, and the desire to close those performance gaps is leading some to believe that the cause of the underperformance is a bigotry that can't be defined or pointed at, but exists nonetheless. Therefore, additional steps must be taken.

The problem is that these policies have resulted in overtly racist hiring practices, while having the opposite effect on performance. In the first stage of underperformance, it leads to declining math scores, before eventually leading to an underperformance in all other subjects.

The largest contingent of my family is one of the ethnic groups that have chronic academic underperformance, I would assert that the continued underperformance is not due to bigotry or "institutional racism". It is partially due to economic inequalities, which the blue print addresses. However, the most significant issue is cultural, and it does not matter what changes you make to the schools, none of them change the cultural background of the student. Whereas they do change the culture of the school system.

That is the reason that DE&I policies have such negative effects on academic performance. It is because they are aimed at the wrong problem entirely. And they are doing so by changing employment and educational practices that have been successful for generations.

24.

The purpose of charter schools is to bring different ideas and practices to the community. And to let the choices of parents be the judge as to the value of those new ideas and practices. I would not want charter schools to be forced to run under the same policies as the public schools. That would negate the purpose and potential benefits of charter schools.

25.

The question of a formulaic cola adjustment to pay is particularly appropriate at this time, where we have the highest inflation since 1981. I say that because one of the causes of the record levels of inflation that occurred throughout the 1970s and the first few years of the 1980s was caused by the cola formula exactly as described in this question, that unions across the nation had built into their contracts at that time.

I imagine this proposal is a red herring from certain politicians that are on the campaign trail. I don't believe that any policy maker would once again start that cycle of inflation.

However, I believe it is the mark of a successful organization to pay its employees very well. Parents are keenly aware of the quality of their community's schools, and they are willing to support higher funding to schools and to pay higher taxes, if the academic results justify the tax rates.

26.

I believe that the best decisions the board can make, come from the input of parents, PTAs, teacher focus groups, administrators and the WCTA. I would seek out input during the decision-making process.

27.

Private school vouchers - As discussed earlier in the questionnaire, I do support private school vouchers with limitations that ensure the public schools will not have to shrink, to then be re-invested in heavily if students return.

Waiver of negotiated agreements for charter schools - I am not entirely sure what this refers to. However, I am supportive of charter schools and I believe that the diversity of ideas will lead to a better education for children, as well as improvements in our public schools.

Privatizing positions filled by BOE employees - I am open to the idea that there could be benefits to privatizing non-student facing employees. However, administrators, teachers, counselors and tutors must remain direct employees of the BOE.

Merit pay for teachers and administrators- Merit pay can be a tremendous benefit to improve education for students. I believe that high-performing teachers and administrators should be able to get 30% or more in merit and performance bonuses, above their base pay.

Use of student data in teacher and principal evaluations - I do believe that the performance of students should be used in the evaluation of teachers and administrators.

Taxing authority for the Board of Education - at the last BOE debate we had an interesting back-and-forth about this issue. I do believe that the county commissioners are the policy makers in the community that receive the most feedback about the range of needs of the community. I do think that they are the most

knowledgeable group to determine the amount of taxes that need to be gathered, as well as the priorities that need to be funded.

Granting construction bids to non-prevailing wage companies - my son worked construction in the unions to make his way through college. And he has told me many stories of the negatives that come along with nonunionized companies.

However, it is beyond the scope of the school board to try to add to its responsibilities, judging the social impacts of contractor's compensation packages. It is the legislator's responsibility to determine through minimum wage and employment laws, what is appropriate pay. It is the BOE's responsibility to get the most value for the taxpayer.

Extending the superintendents contract annually - I think that annual contracts for the superintendent is a great idea.

Fractionated tuition for non-public school students to take courses at a public school - All families pay their entire share of taxes whether or not their children use the public schools. If they want to use public schools for certain subjects or activities, than they should be given that opportunity without additional costs.

However, practically speaking there are situations where greatly increasing the number of students in just one activity or class, would create an unmanageable burden on the public schools. In those cases there would need to be limits or other changes, such as mandatory help from the parents of those children, in order for those services to be provided.

28.

All of the topics mentioned in this question fall under the category of job functions, which is under the purview of the Board. However, I assume that WCTA already includes issues such as these in their negotiations.