

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

**2022 Board of County Commissioners
Candidate Questionnaire**

CANDIDATE : John F. Barr

OFFICE SOUGHT : Washington County Board of County Commissioners

CAMPAIGN ADDRESS: 88 West Lee St., Hagerstown, MD. 21740

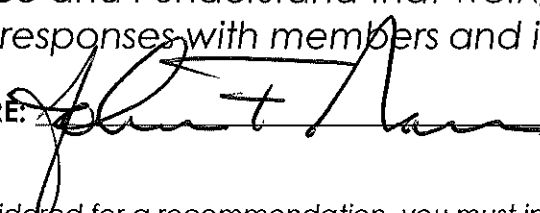
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PHONE NUMBER(S): 301.573.4840 (C) 301.582.0421 (H) 301.739.8800 (O)

EMAIL: jbarr@ellsworthelectric.net

WEBSITE: -

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

CANDIDATE SIGNATURE:  DATE SUBMITTED: July 11, 2022

*Candidates: 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 clearly indicate the questions(s) to which you refer. Please return your completed and signed questionnaire to WCTA, 18047 Oak Ridge Drive, Hagerstown, MD 21740.
Deadline: July 12, 2022.*

Education Funding

Background Points

- With a critical need in closing education gaps, expanding programs and services, community schools, and improving student achievement, in 2016, lawmakers formed the Kirwan Commission to meet the challenges of a changing global economy and prepare Maryland students to be successful citizens in the 21st century.
- The Kirwan Commission's recommendations evolved into The Blueprint for Maryland's Future, which originally passed in 2020, was vetoed by Governor Hogan, and had its veto overridden in 2021. The Blueprint revises the state's school funding formula for the first time in nearly two decades. Over the next 13 years, the Blueprint calls for billions of dollars of new investment in Maryland schools that would expand career and technical education programs, community schools, and pre-k; provide more resources for students from backgrounds of poverty and students with special needs; increase educator pay; hire more educators and expand and diversify the educator pipeline; and create a new, more rigorous accountability system. These programs are designed to raise achievement and address Maryland's economic inequality with programs to target concentrated poverty.
- The County [Name of Office] will have a significant impact on the implementation of the Blueprint, and the future funding and success of Washington County schools. The Blueprint is landmark legislation, but there is a continued need for investment in Washington County schools to see that the Blueprint is successfully implemented, and in ensuring that educator voices are heard and respected throughout implementation.

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.

Public education is number one on my campaign list. It is the responsibility locally and statewide to provide full funding for public education. It would be a priority to utilize local funding to assist our local elected school board and to have the resources and facilities needed for a proper and first-class education in Washington County. The Kirwan Blueprint will guide us into the future with public education initiatives. I am committed as a County Commissioner Candidate to working with our local elected school board to fulfill these requirements. This is why I am opposed to a tax cut knowing that in the near term, significant dollars will be required to meet these needs and challenges. Certainly, economic development and property value increases in our community will assist in these endeavors, and that trust tax increases can be either avoided or minimized accordingly.

2. During the implementation of The Blueprint for Maryland's Future, each county will need to provide money to cover their local share for the Blueprint. What is your plan to meet your county's required local share?

To continue to work together in our budget process to find sustainable income and financial wherewithal to meet Kirwan Blueprint requirements.

3. There is considerable room for improvement in addressing educator recruitment and retention. Class sizes have increased because of cost-cutting measures and/or due to hiring freezes, layoffs, and retirements. Many support personnel positions have been eliminated. And Maryland is always challenged with filling educator jobs because we import nearly half of all certificated teachers from prep programs in other states. The coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated these shortages. At the same time, the Blueprint calls for the hiring of 15,000 additional educators to provide more individualized attention to students. The regional job market is extremely competitive, and WCPS is struggling to offer competitive compensation. How will you address critical concerns with educator recruitment and retention?

Once again, it is critical to meet the needs of our local WCPS by having quality teachers retained, well-compensated, and well respected, and assurances of retirement and pension plans. Trusting this would assist in hiring and retaining qualified teachers.

4. Do you support or oppose Maryland's updated maintenance of effort law that requires local jurisdictions to fund the local share of all wealth-equalized formulas, instead of only the foundation formula?

☒ Support

☐ Oppose

Additional Comments:

N/A

Public Funding for Private Schools

Background Points

- WCTA/WCESP 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/WCESP is opposed to this type of diversion of public funding with no accountability.

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

_____ Support

☒ Oppose

Additional Comments:

N/A

Collective Bargaining

Background Points

- WCTA/WCESP 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.

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

☒ Support

☐ Oppose

Additional Comments:

N/A

Continuing Impact of the Pandemic

Background Points

- The pandemic has exacerbated a pre-existing, multifaceted housing crisis. Housing costs continue to rise, keeping some families out of the market entirely, while those whose incomes were slashed during the pandemic have fallen so far behind that the Census Bureau estimates 7 million households as of late June 2021 face eviction when the temporary moratorium on eviction enacted during the pandemic is lifted.
- The pandemic has also increased stresses, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), food insecurity, and digital divide issues for our students.
- The pandemic has exacerbated a pre-existing, multifaceted housing crisis. Housing costs continue to rise, keeping some families out of the market entirely, while those whose incomes were slashed during the pandemic have fallen so far behind that the National Equity Atlas estimates approximately 129,000 Maryland households, as of August 2021, are behind on rent and face possible eviction when the temporary moratorium on eviction enacted during the pandemic is lifted.

7. How will your budget address increased needs for mental health supports for students and educators in the wake of the pandemic?

Continue to work with the local health administration at the Washington County Health Department, Meritus, and local health providers.

8. Safe and affordable housing is necessary for all students to be able to succeed in school. What is your position on affordable housing and how it relates to education?

Continue to work with the Housing Authority, Habitat for Humanity, and the Chamber of Commerce to seek, develop, and retain affordable housing due to its critical connection with enhancing educational activities and abilities.

9. The pandemic further illuminated the immediate need for reliable, affordable access to technology for all students and educators in our state. How would you propose to eliminate the digital divide?

This is a funding requirement and initiative to ensure that each student has access to the electronics, internet, laptops, and the digital footprint needed to enhance their educational abilities.

Racial and Social Justice

Background Points

- WCTA/WCESP unequivocally believes that our diversity makes us stronger. We fundamentally believe that schools should be safe, welcoming, and nurturing learning environments for students of all backgrounds and beliefs, and places where all our students see themselves in the lessons they learn and experiences they enjoy. While students of color made up approximately 64% of the student population across the state in school year 2019-2020, our state had only 29% teachers of color, 38% principals of color, and 45% assistant principals of color. MSEA was represented on the Kirwan Commission and a vocal advocate of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future in part because of our support for training and developing high-quality teachers and education leaders, particularly those from diverse and historically underrepresented backgrounds.
- Every child, regardless of their background or zip code, deserves education justice and equitable access to opportunities, resources, and supports. We believe that the lives of our Black and Brown students matter and that all our students have a fundamental right to be educated in safe, healthy, and supportive learning communities and all our educators deserve safe, healthy, and supportive working environments.
- Maryland and U.S. history are far more diverse than is generally reflected in the content and courses currently taught in our public schools. Far too many Marylanders can progress through their formal primary and secondary education and rarely, if ever, see themselves reflected in the content they are learning or hear about themselves in the stories they read and are told. This lack of inclusivity negatively impacts not only our students' ownership of and agency in their learning, but it also adversely impacts their overall engagement in their learning and portrays a one-sided view of our history for all students. This disconnect is further exacerbated by the dearth of a more diverse field of educators in our schools and by the disproportionate (and sometime inaccurate) representations seen in society and in our culture that ultimately reinforces a sense of "otherness" for the people, communities, and cultures who have been rendered less relevant and less valuable. WCTA/WCESP recognizes the vital importance of ensuring that all students learn about historical figures who not only had a tremendous impact on the forming of our state and our nation but whose actions and sacrifices laid the foundation upon which this nation's pledge of "liberty and justice for all" must be built.
- WCTA/WCESP committed to developing critical thinking skills in our students because we know that they enable them to better understand the problems our society faces and to develop collective solutions. To that end, we are abundantly clear that truth and honesty are fundamental components of teaching and learning, as are academic integrity and professional responsibility. Our essential mission is to prepare our students for college, career, and life and to play an active role in our democracy.

10. WCTA/WCESP supports honesty in education. To encourage critical thinking, we believe educators should have professional autonomy and should be afforded the deference to teach the truth in their classrooms, schools, and districts. Do you support or oppose this position?

☒ Support

☐ Oppose

Additional Comments:

I think the key word in this critical thinking is the five letter word, **TRUTH**. No CRT, no transgender, or other far left driven initiatives in our local school system. The truth means, back to the basics (English, Math, Science, and correct History in its entirety).

11. How will you support diversity, equity, and inclusion for all students throughout the county? What specific policies do you support whose goals are focused on providing equitable access, opportunities, resources, and supports?

All students are to be treated fairly, equally, and without partiality. Opportunities should be presented in a fair and balanced inequitable fashion giving each and everyone regardless of their background equal access to meeting their desires, future plans, and capabilities.

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, nutrition, youth employment, and education. Each of these areas play a large role in whether students can learn and do well in school—making it imperative that these opportunity gaps be closed if we want to provide an equitable education in our communities. According to data collected by MSDE, 48% of Maryland public school students were enrolled for free and reduced-price meals this school year (meaning their family income level is at or below 185% of federal income poverty guidelines).
- WCTA/WCESP 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.
- The Blueprint phases in community schools beginning in FY20, starting with 219 schools with 80% or more of their students enrolled for free and reduced-price meals. Community schools will be added, phased in according to highest levels of poverty first, until FY27, when a predicted 557—nearly one-third of all schools in the state—are projected to become community schools. That makes this one of the largest scale expansions of community schools in the nation.
- The American Rescue Plan provided additional funding to assist with the expansion of small group instruction delineated in the Blueprint. Of these funds, at least 20% must be used to address pandemic-associated learning gaps through the implementation of evidence-based interventions, such as summer learning or summer enrichment, extended day, comprehensive afterschool programs, or extended school year programs.
- WCTA/WCESP 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.

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

☒ Support

☐ Oppose

Additional Comments:

Providing funding allows in the budget process.

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.

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

Continue to post digitally, print, and mass media the desire, opportunity and encouragement of parental support. In this day and age of broken homes and grandparents raising children, etc. it is extremely difficult to encourage the much needed parental support, which is very well proven is paramount to the advancement and assistance to students to maximize achievement through extended scholastic trade school, enhancing their maximum life skills and abilities.

Privatization

Background Points

- WCTA/WCESP 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. In the last few 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 have been multi-county efforts 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 do not require. After privatizing, local school boards lose control over the individuals working in schools and have little ability to provide input on job performance.
- Privatizers often use an argument of cost-savings as a means of winning contracts. The amount is often misleading because they intentionally underestimate first year operating costs. Ultimately, they reduce hours, health care coverage, or just cut jobs. All these steps lead to increase in local unemployment and less money in the community overall.

11. 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:

N/A

Essay Questions

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

1. Fully Funded Schools
2. School Safety
3. Teacher Pay - Retention

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

Increase tax base not rate. No to tax cut.