

2024 WCTA & WCESP
Washington County Board of Education
Candidate Questionnaire

CANDIDATE: April A Zentmeyer

OFFICE SOUGHT: WCPS BOE member

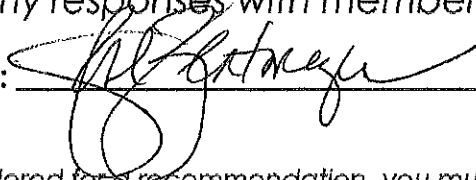
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I confirm that the responses provided here are my official positions in seeking local office and I understand that WCTA & WCESP reserves the right to share my responses with members and interested parties.

CANDIDATE SIGNATURE: _____



DATE SUBMITTED: _____

2/28/24

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 & WCESP.**

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 Board of Education will have a significant impact on implementation of the Blueprint, including 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 available state and county resources in your budget deliberations.

The five pillars of the Blueprint including early childhood education, high quality teachers and leaders, career and college readiness, resources to assure wraparound services to students, and accountability to the AIB and ERT will dictate how we prioritize our budget. Meeting the requirements of the Blueprint is expensive and not an option. Priority two includes combatting inflation – also, not an option. Safety, security, mental health and behavioral supports, as well as salary and compensation to attract and retain staff is again – not an option. Budget priorities to meet students' needs and assure successful transitions into life after high school, while doing more with less is a delicate balance, especially when one takes into consideration our aging facilities. Repealing the 3% tax cut granted during the election year would indeed provide revenue to address the above.

2. 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. How will you address critical concerns with educator recruitment and retention?

I am a fan of Grow Your Own. In conjunction with Salisbury State-downtown campus, we are doing just that. And it is exciting. Our student apprenticeship program is another innovative idea, whose time has come. Our data shows that every student who had access to a reading tutor made gains in reading. It is my hope that this experience will also produce teachers for WCPS.

I am a teacher. It is not what I did, it is who I am. While it is imperative to provide fair wages, our staff must be afforded due respect and appreciation for their passionate investment in children's lives. It is time for everyone to realize that without teachers, we do not have education (I know! Novel revelation! However, it has been lost in the translation.) Truly, our future is in school today. That said (sorry – I know I'm preaching to the choir), a priority is to quit hiring people in the ivory tower and return educators to the classroom to share in the mission and reduce class sizes. (This is a Blueprint goal in 2026.) We need more teachers, who make a difference every day because they can. We are fortunate to have less than a handful of actual teacher vacancies. It reveals volumes about the people who are making **the** difference. My goal is to provide an alternative when possible (ABLE is underutilized) for students who disrupt rather than engage in the educational process, as well as, offer CTE programs that engage students before they disrupt.

Recruitment is at its best when it is word of mouth. If we do all within our power, including reducing class size, applying discipline for disruptive behavior, supplying high quality materials, provide professional support, autonomy, and COMPENSATION, our teachers will come and stay.

Public Funding for Private Schools

Background Points

- The WCTA & WCESP associations believe 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.
- Non-public school funding for programs in the budget such as textbooks, technology, school construction, and vouchers reduce the state's General Fund while subsidizing the cost of private education. Data from the first few years of the BOOST program indicated that more than 70% of voucher recipients already attended and paid for private school before receiving the voucher.
- 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 Readiness Standards, student retention rates, graduation rates, demographics, or discipline or suspension policies. Without these measures, it is impossible to effectively evaluate the programs funneling public tax dollars to private schools.

3. As a Board member, are you in favor of allocating public funding to home and privately schooled students?

_____ Support

x Oppose

Additional Comments: I do support a parent's right to choose the best education for their child. However, public funding is for public schools.

Evaluations and Less Testing, More Learning

Background Points

- The WCTA & WCESP associations believe that educator evaluation systems must be educator-informed, research-based, and collaboratively developed. Evaluation systems should be fair, transparent, timely, rigorous, valid, and designed to improve instruction by focusing on teaching and learning.
- Maryland law mandates that student growth is a "significant component" and "one of the multiple measures" in a teacher's evaluation. No evaluation criterion can account for more than 35%. The law also mandates that evaluation systems must be mutually agreed upon at the local level.
- A key provision of evaluation systems is the requirement for local agreement between school boards, superintendents, and local associations. Such local development allows for the evaluation system to meet the unique needs of each district.
- The WCTA & WCESP associations believe the continued push for high-stakes student assessments undermines educator's creativity and their ability to respond to the needs of students. Instead of high-stakes assessments, WCTA & WCESP supports high-quality assessments that support student learning from a rich curriculum and with room for educator's voices in the development of curriculum and assessment.
- Additionally, the WCTA & WCESP associations support rigorous and relevant professional development through the continued alignment of evaluation systems.

4. Do you support or oppose local autonomy to develop evaluation systems in compliance with statute and regulation?

x Support

_____ Oppose

Additional Comments:

I agree whole-heartedly with home-rule. We know what is best for our students and how to design evaluations that accurately assess student learning, design professional development with fidelity, and a Program of Studies that best meet their needs.

5. Do you support or oppose efforts to overturn school districts mutually agreed upon, statutorily compliant evaluation models in pursuit of one-size-fits-all models developed by federal and state agencies, rather than local education agencies?

Support

Oppose

Additional Comments:

Maryland is America in miniature. We are as different from Baltimore City as we are from the Eastern Shore and Montgomery County. We are leaders in the state in many areas because we are not competing, but creatively addressing what is needed in our county by our students. That cannot be captured in a mandated evaluation.

6. As an elected Board of Education member, how will you work with WCPS, WCTA & WCESP to implement the Less Testing, More Learning Act?

Support

Oppose

Additional Comments:

I support our negotiations teams who firelessly work together to achieve this goal.

Collective Bargaining

Background Points

- The WCTA & WCESP associations support efforts to protect and enhance the state's collective bargaining laws.
- 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.

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

Support

Oppose

Additional Comments:

Our teams work in tandem to provide all teachers with a fair negotiated contract.

8. How familiar are you with the WCTA & WCESP contracts?

Familiar

Unfamiliar

Additional Comments:

As a member of the Board, I am privy to negotiations. (My daughter is also a teacher, and served, as I did, as a building rep)

9. What changes, if any, would you like to see? And how would you honor the negotiated agreement, especially in tight fiscal times?

Teachers (and support staff) first – before additional positions at CES, new facilities, new cars – *anything* that does not address students' direct needs. I took a lot of flack when I said I would vote against anything that did not directly touch a students' life. I still mean it. We cannot lose sight of who we are serving.

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.

10. How will you address increased needs for mental health support for students and educators in the wake of the pandemic?

The Blueprint has provided wraparound services supporting students including the hiring of additional security, behavior analysts, social workers, and counselors. Helping our students heal is a top priority. That is only accomplished in a safe and caring environment.

11. 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?

We are working on this every single day. Every student has a device and access to the internet where possible. It is an area of excellence in WCPS.

Racial and Social Justice

Background Points

- The WCTA & WCESP associations unequivocally believe 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.
- The history of Maryland and U.S. history is 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. The WCTA & WCESP associations recognize 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.
- The WCTA & WCESP associations are 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.

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, in 2022, 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).
- The WCTA & WCESP associations support the establishment of community schools. We recognize that community schools can be transformative if done right—that is if they involve the community in a meaningful and ongoing way and are more than wrap-around services at a school.
- 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 WCTA & WCESP associations support 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? Do you support the transformative model of community schools or the wrap-around service model of community schools?

x Support

_____ Oppose

Additional Comments:

Our community schools are already supporting students in these areas. With the formulaic change in FARM calculations, we will see the advantages of this program extended to other schools. It is an idea whose time has fortunately arrived. I visit schools regularly. The growth of students in our city schools is nothing short of miraculous.

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.

14. As a Board member, what would you do to ensure that parents and families from all faiths and no matter where they're from are welcomed and supported in our schools?

I welcome ALL parental participation and feedback – via email and phone calls, Board public comments, letters, at community gatherings, at school gatherings, and during the host of opportunities to engage informally and listen carefully in the community – REGARDLESS of faith. Feedback and transparency are essential elements to parents, guardians and grandparents.

Privatization

Background Points

- The WCTA & WCESP associations oppose 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.

15. As a Board member, 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 will add bus drivers to the list. Every person a student comes into contact with has the opportunity to affect student achievement-especially if it is a neighbor. We need to be on the same team. Farming out services is a last resort. (That is also Why I have opposed the last five hires for leadership positions in WCPS. Hiring internally is the most important feedback we can give to our staff.