

**2024 WCTA & WCESP**  
**Washington County Board of Education**  
**Candidate Questionnaire**

CANDIDATE: Michael P Keifer

OFFICE SOUGHT: Seat on school board

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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: Michael P. Keifer DATE SUBMITTED: 8/14/2024

*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.

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?

## 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

Oppose

Additional Comments:

## 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?

Support

Oppose

Additional Comments:

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:

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:

## 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:

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

Familiar

Unfamiliar

Additional Comments:

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



## 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

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

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?

## 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.

12. The WCTA & WCESP associations support 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:

13. 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?

## 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?

Support

Oppose

Additional Comments:

## Parental Involvement and Public Support

### ***Background Points***

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

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?

## 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:



## **Essay Question**

What are the top three things you would like to accomplish in the next four years if you are elected to the Board?

### Answers to the required questionnaire

- 1) I am a strong proponent for early education. I feel that Pre-K and Head Start, both provide a very important part of a child's development into their educational experience. Each of the elements of the blue print hold a valuable importance with a student's development. In providing an environment that includes the proper selection process of educators and leaders, the proper course of preparedness for students to find the path to success, and to instill a positive mindset for college or careers. To maintain this formula for our students and their parents, wanting and demanding a proper education for them. It's imperative that the board works hard to assure that the monies need and required is allocated, and not misappropriated or re-allocated.
- 2) Acquiring and retaining the best qualified educators is and will be a never ending dilemma that members of boards of education will find themselves having to deal with. Single-handedly no one, including myself has the powers to find the required solutions. Collectively as a group along with the proper data from the various sources, you should be able to arrive at a selection process that should sustain what is required to maintain those professionals in our county's educational fabric.
- 3) I understand completely the summary of the third paragraph of the question, and therefore oppose that process.
- 4) I believe that proper evaluations of all educators should be mandated and required to be sure that all students receive the best that every teacher who will be assigned to the student's educational framework. Over my many years of life, I have read about or saw on the news, where in some school systems, there have been cases of teachers and other educators had gone many years stowed away in empty class rooms or offices. Every student deserves better than this and any environment within any educational system that would allow this to happen needs to be dealt with and all parties removed from the educational system.
- 5) I am in support. I have never been one who steadfastly falls in line with the philosophy of "One Size Fits All".
- 6) Without a broader explanation of the Less Testing/ More Learning Act it is difficult for me to give a definitive answer. I've always believed that testing of all areas of learning is a necessary requirement.
- 7) During my years of service with the Division of Corrections for the state of Maryland, I served as the President of the Maryland Classified Employees Association. I held this office for multiple years. I also served as a member of the statewide board of directors for the association. I was selected twice as the Area 4 member of the year. Area # 4 represented the 4 most western

counties of the state. Because the association had paid representatives who recruited for membership, I was also on the contract negotiation committee.

- 8) Although I am not familiar with the contracts of WCTA and WCESP, as I stated in the answer to question #7, I'm sure that most issues and concerns would be quite similar in scope.
- 9) Not knowing the language in the most current negotiated contract, it's difficult to answer this question. In honoring the current contract, it would take a collective discussion with the body of the seated board and the members of the negotiating committee to rationalize a agreed solution.
- 10) Due to not being able to fully read the Background Points for this question, I'm unable to give a proper and complete answer. When a body of decision makers are confronted with a rare debilitating situation as the covid pandemic, they are called upon to navigate through situations not before presented to them. Not being a mental health expert, I would strongly rely on the science and medical experts to make those choices needed.
- 11) Given the current atmosphere of the educational system. I doubt that the word eliminate is possible. I would like to see a system where the educators devise a method where the teachers are able to get the students to see the importance of using their thinking abilities to achieve solutions to problems.
- 12) In teaching the truth in the classroom, it is my belief that the school system remains focused on the importance of learning the skills of Reading, Math, History and the development of strong social skills. There are many school systems across the country that are trying to rewrite the history books and don't show enough effort to teaching those fundamental skills that our country lacks compared to many countries around the world.
- 13) Each category listed in this question has its own specific characteristics that would need to be addressed. I would need to be able to know what the current language is pertaining to each of those categories to make a fair and just decision regarding future decision making.
- 14) When my children were attending our public schools in the city, I made it a point to take part in their school experience. I would serve on PTA committees, Parent Advisory councils and any other group that would work towards making the students experience as fulfilling as possible. I would work hand in hand with other parents (mostly the mothers) assisting teachers with putting together special events or fundraisers. As a board member, I would take the boots on the ground approach and make myself accessible to all those (teachers and parents) who feel the need to address issues and situations that need solutions. I would welcome the opportunity to answer any request to address a public group to assure those in attendance that we as board members are indeed interested in providing all children with the best possible education that our teaching staff and support teams can provide.
- 15) Working in the correctional field for twenty years and being a part of the Maryland Classified Employees Association, I have had opportunities to attend meetings where the subject of outsourcing was on the agenda. Almost always when the committees would discuss the subject of outsourcing, there would be data presented from multiple sources reflecting the deterioration of those services and skill sets over time. To maintain the highest level of professionalism, it is imperative to have your core group of employees in the position where

they can be properly monitored and evaluated to continue to provide the best possible service and or training required and demanded.

### **Essay Question**

I would like to work collectively with the other members of the board to create a positive learning experience in each of our schools.

I would like to work with the county government to continue to maintain a positive working relationship, so that the county department of education has a significant voice in any future budget negotiations, so that we might be able to satisfy what is required to retain and acquire the teaching professionals for the classrooms. To provide safe and adequate facilities. In addition, to properly plan and evaluate any future schools.

I want to work with the school system, the Washington County Sheriff and all government agencies to assure that our student population has a safe and welcoming atmosphere that the parents expect and demand for their children.

### **Additional Information For Consideration**

72 Year old, long time resident of Washington County.

U.S.Army Veteran , 13 ears of service. Viet Nam Era

Retired State Employee, Department of Corrections

Married 50 years, Two daughters, 4 grand children, 2 great grand children

Graduate of North Hagerstown High School, Class of 1969

Graduate of the first class of the Washington County Vocational Technical School

### **Experience**

2016: was selected to serve on the Board of Directors for Washington County Head Start. I as the President of the organization.

2006: Appointed by the Board of County Commissioners to a member of the Local Management Board.

2002: Under Dr. Elizabeth M. Morgan, Superintendent of the Washington County Schools, Served as a member of the Washington County Alcohol and Drug Task Force.

Ran for Washington County School Board in the 80's

Past President of the Washington County Council of Parents and Teachers.

Served of the Maryland State Board of Directors for Parents and Teachers.

Organized and hosted the first statewide convention for Parents and Teachers in Hagerstown.

Served as President of several PTA's as my children were in school.

Served as the President of the Maryland Classified Employees Association while working for the state.

Served on the statewide Board of Directors for the Maryland Classified Employees Association.

Selected as Area #4 member of the year on two different occasions. Area #4 represents the four most western counties of the state.

Served on several statewide committees for the Maryland Classified Employees Association.

Resolutions, Steering and Convention.

Co- Chaired Convention Committee held in Ocean City Maryland.

Chaired two statewide golf tournaments for the Maryland State Commissioner of Corrections.

Spoke before committees in Annapolis in support of state employees and retirees benefits.