

2024 WCTA & WCESP
Washington County Board of Education
Candidate Questionnaire

CANDIDATE: Robin Merchant Spickler

OFFICE SOUGHT: Board of Ed ~ Washington County

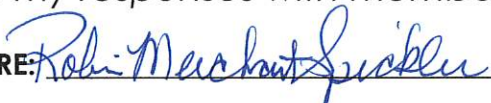
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I confirm that the responses provided here are my official positions in seeking local office and I understand that WCTA & WCESP reserves the right to share my responses with members and interested parties.

CANDIDATE SIGNATURE:  DATE SUBMITTED: 02/26/2024

*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.

***1st assess the current situation, prioritize, and allocate resources accordingly.**

***Delegate and empower a team to create a plan.**

***Keep monitoring and adjusting the plan as needed.**

***Communicate and collaborate with others.**

***Review and reflect on the results.**

***Have many conversations with the County Commissioners.**

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?

***Teacher certification to be more accessible.**

***Support funding for quality schools.**

***Expand and diversify the teaching profession.**

***Fight against privatization of schools.**

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:

***Public schools depend on local, state, and federal funds.**

***Public schools are funded by taxpayers.**

***All public funding should go towards 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?

Support

Oppose

Additional Comments:

***Local autonomy would give the capacity to decide for oneself and compose a course of action, decisions would be respected, honored, and heeded.**

***Unit members would develop confidence in their own abilities and be able to do things for themselves.**

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:

***One size fits all models do not fit every state/county, there must be diversity.**

*** Teachers are asked to acknowledge the diversity in their classroom, so evaluations should reflect the diversity of the local education agencies.**

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:

***Work with the local Associations to lobby in Annapolis.**

***Have conversations with local Associations as to what their plans are and what support do they need.**

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:

***Collective bargaining gives employees a collective voice for all not just some.**

***Gives fairer policies, improves job productivity and loyalty with less turnover.**

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

Familiar

Unfamiliar

Additional Comments:

***I am familiar with the WCTA contract. I was a WCTA representative for 44 years and served on the WCTA Board before I retired in 2020.**

***I am not as familiar with the WCESP contract.**

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

***Be realist about the needs of the unit members.**

***Be willing to meet halfway.**

***Continue support for planning time and days.**

***Continue support for unit members with misbehaving students and serious incidents.**

***Consider smaller class sizes.**

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?

***Provide resources to all students and families in Washington County.**

***Provide stable staff to student ratios.**

***Provide more mental health personnel for students and unit members.**

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?

***Increase connectivity in all communities.**

***Work with local internet services to provide a more affordable service.**

***Provide internet enabled devices.**

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:

***Students have the right to an education that is correct in all details that portrays history and reflects our diversity.**

***The curriculum needs to be inclusive, updated and reflect the experiences of all groups.**

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?

***It's the law and it should be followed.**

***All students regardless of their race, color, national, origin, sex, or disabilities deserve an education.**

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:

I support the transformative model of community schools because it focuses on the whole child and would integrate many things. It would develop partnerships with the community and business. Areas of focus would be the needs of students and families and identify services already provided at the school. The services provided would fit the community needs and the school would be created and run by the people that know the children the best.

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?

All families should feel welcome and safe in any school building. It should be where they can find connections, be represented and they know that all people are treated with respect and dignity. Develop a policy to be put in place to hold schools accountable.

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:

***When companies come into a school, they do not know the community or the students, they are looking to make a profit.**

***Most ESP's live and work in their communities and have connections to the schools, privatization would greatly affect the schools/community/staff/students.**

***Funding is needed to pay salaries, maintain school facilities, provide educational supplies and services and meals for students.**

***When there is a need for a special education teacher or a health nurse for a student and those positions cannot be filled in house, then yes contracting out would need to be considered.**

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?

In the next 4 years, I want to become more informed of the Board of Education policies and guidelines, so I can better support students and unit members. I will also attend Board of Education functions as well as MABE events, to stay informed of current happenings. Signing up and attending workshops would allow me to be a better Board of Education member to better serve the students and unit members in Washington County.