

2008 QUESTIONNAIRE TO CANDIDATES FOR Howard County School Board

HOWARD COUNTY EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

If you wish to be considered as a recommended candidate by HCEA, please return the completed questionnaire to the HCEA office, 5082 Dorsey Hall Drive, Ste. 102, Ellicott City, Maryland 21042 – Attention: Dan Collins

Name: Allen Dyer **County Council District: 5**

Address: 13340 Hunt Ridge, Ellicott City, Maryland 21042

Occupation: Lawyer/Computer Consultant/Lobbyist

Work Phone: 410-531-3965 Home #: 410-531-3965

Children:

Name: Abe Dyer

Age: 26

School: West Friendship, Mt View Middle, River Hill, Boston University

Name: Ann Marie Dyer **Age: 21**

School: West Friendship, Mt View Middle, River Hill, Boston University

Education/Training (list degrees & Institutions where received)

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Lincoln High School, Seattle, Washington | HS Diploma |
| 2. USAF Academy, Colorado Springs, Colorado | BS in Engineering Sciences |
| 3. Pilot Training, Del Rio, Texas | Pilot Rating |
| 4. University of MD School of Law, Baltimore, MD | Juris Doctor. |

Employment:

Employer: Proprietor of Computer Law Laboratory & Allen Dyer, Attorney

Address: 13340 Hunt Ridge, Ellicott City, Maryland 21042

General Responsibilities:

- 1. As a computer consultant I help small businesses select, order, install and operate computer systems.**
- 2. As an attorney I represent individuals that have problems with large organizations.**
- 3. As a lobbyist, I advocate on behalf of community associations in Annapolis.**

Union Membership (past or present): None

Community Activities: I currently serve on the board of directors for the Blacksmith Association of Central Maryland. I also devote a significant amount of time to serving as moderator/co-moderator on electronic bulletin boards. For example, I am the moderator of: “howardpubliced” an electronic list devoted to Howard County public education issues; “BGCN” an electronic list devoted to Maryland blacksmithing; and “FACNET” an electronic list devoted to forward air controllers that served in combat during the Vietnam War.

Allen Dyer's Response

2008 QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SCHOOL BOARD

Please complete the following questions. Feel free to add any attachments if you need more room to complete your answers.

1. What it comes to the development of the school budget, what do you view as your top priorities?

Based on my understanding of current Howard County needs, I would approach the school budget with the following priorities:

#1 STAFF—I think we need to view the Howard County Public School System (“HCPSS”) budget in the context of surrounding counties and the cost of living in Howard County. The Board of Education needs to insure that our teachers are paid competitive salaries and those salaries should be sufficient to provide teachers with a viable option to live in Howard County.

#2 CLASS SIZE—In general, a smaller classroom size makes for a more positive learning experience and prevents students from feeling they are being “warehoused.” See my answer to Question 4.

#3 PERFORMANCE GAP— The HCPSS equity report defined fairness as: “Schools with disproportionate numbers of children with multiple needs require more support than schools that are less challenged.” Thus, in support of that policy, the Board of Education needs to work with HCEA to develop an incentive system that would reward the best qualified teachers for volunteering to transfer to those schools with performance gap problems. See my answer to Question 7.

#4 SCHOOL REPAIR & RENOVATION—The Board of Education has to be the driving force behind building repair & renovation because the Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance fails to impose a moratorium on new construction simply because the public schools are in disrepair. The Board, therefore, should guarantee repair & renovation of existing schools is funded prior to new school construction.

#5 Innovation Projects—I believe the Board of Education has to foster a spirit of innovation and I would support designating a budget item of no more than \$500,000 for innovation projects. Each innovation project would

be limited to \$50,000. Teachers, students and citizens could submit project proposals directly to the Board of Education. For each proposal, the Board would hold a public hearing and give the Superintendent 30 days to file a report prior to voting on whether to approve the project. A final written report the Board would be required of each innovation project.

The above are the priorities that I would bring to the table, however, I am not rigid with respect to budget priority matters. I like to think that a rational argument can persuade me just as, I hope, my rational arguments would have some persuasive power with the other 6 board members.

TRANSPARENT BUDGET PROCESS—In contrast to being flexible about budget item priorities, I would be a strong, unrelenting advocate for a transparent budget process.

IMPROVED ACCOUNTING SYSTEM—I would also a strong advocate for improved accounting procedures. In order for any budget process to be effective, the HCPSS accounting system has to provide a clear picture of whether funding is adequate for the school system and for individual schools. I would join those on the Board who believe there is much room for improvement in the HCPSS accounting system and I think a shift to fund accounting should be given careful consideration.

2. What measures would you support to address the issue of teacher workload?

The primary workload of teachers should be classroom instruction. Additional duties that leave less time for classroom instruction should be re-examined on a regular basis and eliminated if those non-classroom instructional duties cannot be adequately justified. Our teachers must not become overly burdened with administrative tasks and menial duties even if it means hiring additional administrative support staff to allow our teachers to spend full time on classroom instruction.

The starting point for efforts to reduce non-classroom duties is to listen to the teachers and seek their evaluation of the educational return on each their existing time commitments and, even more importantly, to solicit and reward innovative suggestions on how teachers can make the learning process more efficient.

Examples:

- A \$500 bounty could be placed on the identification of an unnecessary administrative form. Educators responsible for the elimination of an unnecessary form should also be recognized on a system wide basis.
- Red tape that is required by statute should be identified and special funds allocated to comply with the statute. Once the cost of compliance has been established, the Board of Education should consider whether to approach the General Assembly for elimination of the specific statutory requirement or an amendment to either reduce the cost of compliance or to provide a statewide fund for the cost of compliance. COST! COST! COST! There is a need to quantify the cost in order to effectively advocate for change.
- Nothing should be REKEYED. Rewards should be established for educators that identify documents within the HCPSS that are being “re-invented” on a regular basis and an on-line depository should be established where teachers can download the works that have already been created.
- Our teachers need a FLAT hierarchy when it comes to dealing with workload distractions. For example, I would support a Wiki based project for collaborating with other teachers, administrators and members of the Board on how to eliminate unnecessary administrative overhead. Such an effort should also be open to some form of participation by the public.
- The quandary over whether specific information can be discussed and/or disclosed to members of the public must be eliminated. To that end, confidential information that is not subject to disclosure by the Public Information Act (“PIA”) should be segregated, *ab initio*, from information that is open to the public.
- A \$500 reward should be available each week for a teacher that creates and implements an innovative use of information technology (“IT”). At the end of the academic year, a random selection of students/teachers/parents should be asked to rank order the weekly award winners and the innovation ranked highest should be awarded

an additional \$5,000. Depending on response from the teaching staff, it might make sense to have independent IT innovation awards at the elementary, middle school, and high school levels.

As a Board member, I would be a strong advocate for innovative approaches to making the most effective use of our most important personnel—the classroom teacher.

In addition to the reduction of administrative overhead, teachers must be supported with educational resources on an “as needed” basis.

For example, when I served on the board of the River Hill Boosters Association, a major component of our annual budget was devoted to providing additional supplies for teachers such as paper for the copy machines, acid free paper for the school registrar to use when communicating with colleges, audio supplies for the language labs, shelving for storage of musical instruments, etc. The Board of Education, however, should not place HCPSS teachers in a position where they are dependent on booster clubs to raise money for classroom supplies because such supplies are part of the government’s constitutional obligation to provide to every Maryland public school student. The underlying notion of public schools is the provision of educational support on an “as needed” basis rather than forcing teachers to be dependent on the economic status of their students’ parents.

In sum, teachers must be relieved of administrative distractions and provided with “as needed” classroom support in order to nurture a culture of innovation that excites students and teachers alike. A great school system is one that has students and teachers anxiously looking forward to the beginning of the new school year.

3. Do you support or oppose vouchers/stipends for private schools?

I believe public schools represent the best opportunity to prepare young Americans to face whatever challenges the future brings. While I recognize and respect the right of others to elect to place their children in private schools instead of public schools, I vigorously oppose the use of public funds for vouchers/stipends for those who voluntarily and, in my opinion, wrongly choose to send their children to private schools.

I do, however, support the use of public funds to provide necessary educational services for children with special needs even if that means paying private facilities to provide services that are unavailable at public schools.

4. In regard to class size, what specific goals or limits would you like to see implemented on each level?

Small class size is particularly important for the early grades and I support a first and second grade class size of 19 students. For grades 3 to 5, class size should be no more than 25.

I believe the class size goal in elementary schools should be utilized as a maximum classroom size but I think, at the high school level, an average class size approach that permits creative combinations of individual smaller and larger classroom sizes within a department may be justifiable.

5. Do you support charter schools? If yes, under what conditions, if any?

I see charter schools as a possible solution where the community has lost confidence in the public school administration. I don't see that as a major problem in Howard County but there is a statutory procedure for establishing a charter school and, if any group in Howard County, makes a proposal for a charter school, the Board of Education is legally obligated to measure that proposal against the guidelines established by the MARYLAND EDUCATION ARTICLE.

6. What effects, if any, do you believe the recent actions taken by the General Assembly in the special legislative session will have on the upcoming school board budget?

Due to the higher income tax exemption, Howard County will receive about \$2.9 million less annually than previously expected for its share of the state income tax. There will also be a loss of \$7.3 million in annual state-mandated education funding. Source: County Executive Ken Ulman quotations in *The Howard County Times*, 11/21/2007.

Obviously, this is not good news in the short term, but, if the revised tax structure corrects the systematic tax shortfall at the state level, there should be greater predictability of state funding to local governments from year-to-year.

7. How would you ensure that HCPSS hires and retains the best qualified teachers?

It is not enough to simply hire and retain the best qualified teachers. Concerted efforts must also be made to match the best qualified teachers with those who most need the best qualified teachers.

The Board of Education must work with HCEA and the superintendent to develop incentives that will work to match the best qualified teachers with the students who most need them. Teachers should not be paid equal pay for unequal work.

Reference: Prince, Cynthia. *Attracting Well-Qualified Teachers to Struggling Schools*. American Educator (a publication of the American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO), Winter 2002.

8. What subjects, if any, do you feel should not be part of the negotiations process between HCEA and the Board of Education?

EDUCATION ARTICLE § 6-408 states “[A] public school employer . . . shall meet and negotiate . . . all matters that relate to salaries, wages, hours, and other working conditions.” The interpretation of § 6-408 has been directly addressed several times at the appellate court level in Maryland. *See, for example, Montgomery County Education Association v. Board of Education*, 311 Md. 303, 318 (1987) (“Unless it is demonstrated in a particular case that the line drawn by the State Board under § 6-408(b)(1) is arbitrary, or clearly in violation of the EDUCATION ARTICLE, or otherwise contrary to law, the State Board's determination will normally be controlling.”) In keeping with this broad interpretation power, the State Board of Education has recently addressed, and further limited, the matters subject to collective bargaining in *Harford County Board of Education v. Harford County Educational Services Council*. MSBE Opinion 05-24 (July 20, 2005).

The bottom line is the State Board has great latitude in its *ad hoc* determinations of which subjects fall within the “working conditions” subject to collective bargaining.

Still, almost any matter of importance to HCEA would also impact the general public. Thus, subjects that are identified as likely to be struck by the State Board could be raised as part of the quasi-legislative process of the Howard County Board of Education.

For example, if the HCEA came to the Board of Education with a proposal relating to the school year, the Board could redraft the proposal into a local policy, seek advice of the Superintendent, and hold public hearings on the matter. Then, after a public hearing and any amendments that might result from the public hearing process, the Board of Education can vote to implement the final draft of the proposal as a policy decision of the Board rather than a matter of collective bargaining. I believe such a process complies with the letter and the spirit of the EDUCATION ARTICLE.

9. What is your view regarding the current number of assessments given to students in the Howard County Public Schools?

I firmly believe in the value of testing *as part of the educational process*. The student and the teacher need to regularly engage in a review of what the student knows and, just as importantly, what the student does not know. Unfortunately, recent years have seen a proliferation of “assessments” that are used purely for administrative purposes. As a Board member, I would advocate for the reduction of administrative assessments to the statutory minimum.

I understand the answers obtained from this questionnaire may be circulated among members of HCEA and may be used for publication.

Date: December 18, 2007 Signature: Allen R. Dyer