

Democracy for Howard County
2008 Candidate Questionnaire
Candidates for School Board

Answers from Candidate Allen Dyer

Please answer “support” or “oppose” as appropriate for Questions #1-6. Feel free to elaborate.

- (1) Do you support or oppose making parental consent a prerequisite to a student’s participation in sex education classes in our public schools?

I **oppose** making parental consent a prerequisite for sex education. Further, I think the Howard County Board of Education should look to the progressive sex education efforts of the Montgomery County Board of Education for guidance.

Sex education is an integral part of the “Comprehensive Health Education” program and is mandated for all local school systems by the Maryland State Board of Education. Reference: Title 13A, Subtitle 4, Chapter 18 of the Code of Maryland Regulations.

- (2) Do you support or oppose allowing teenaged students to learn about safe sex as part of the public school curriculum?

I **support** educating students regarding the risks involved in various sexual practices and the range of behaviors available to reduce those risks.

The Maryland Comprehensive Health Education Program is mandatory for all public school students and the only provision for parental consent is restricted to HIV/AIDS prevention education. Parents/Guardians may request, in writing, that their student(s) be excused from the HIV/AIDS Prevention Education. Reference: COMAR 13A.04.18.04.

- (3) Do you support or oppose including the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance (including the phrase “under God”) as part of the official school day?

I **oppose** the school administration including the pledge of allegiance as part of the official school day. Even without the “under God,” it is settled law that students cannot be forced to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnett*, 319 U.S. 624 (1943).

- (4) Do you support or oppose the current county-funded program of providing transportation to some religious schools in the county?

As a matter of public safety, I **support the county government** offering bus transportation for student to private schools but I **oppose the Board of Education** providing transportation to any student other than a public schools student. The local boards simply do not have delegated authority to run a public transportation system.

As a parent and a citizen, however, I support publicly funded transportation of students to ANY school because National Highway Traffic Safety Administration statistics show students are more than 80 times safer on a school bus than in a private motor vehicle. The single greatest risk to our students is the trip to and from school. Thus, the provision of school buses by local government for ALL kindergarten through high school students is a worthy use of tax dollars.

- (5) Do you support or oppose the teaching of creationism or what is called “Intelligent Design” as part of the curriculum in county schools?

I **oppose** teaching “Intelligent Design” as part of the science curriculum. On the other hand, creationism and “Intelligent Design” are valid controversial subjects that might well be appropriate for discussion in a social studies class. If such a controversial subject is going to be presented by a Howard County Public Schools (“HCPSS”) teacher, the guidelines provided by HCPSS Policy 2901 “Teaching Controversial Issues” must be followed. For example, the issue must be “presented in an atmosphere free from bias and prejudice” and students must be “able to form and express their own opinions on the issue without jeopardizing their relationship with teachers or the school.”

As an elected official, I would be bound **by oath** to support the federal and state constitutions and the laws promulgated pursuant to those constitutions. The creationism and “Intelligent Design” issues have been well litigated, thus, I would be obligated to perform my duties as a board member in accordance with the opinions of the federal and state courts. See, for example: *Epperson v. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97 (1968); *Edwards v. Aguillard*, 482 U.S. 578 (1987); and, *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District*, 400 F. Supp.2d 707 (2005).

- (6) Do you support or oppose allowing prayer meetings on school grounds?

I **oppose** prayer meetings during the regular school day. Prayer meetings during the official school day are in violation of the separation of church and state – the Establishment Clause. However, as a member of the Board of Education, I would **support** student led religious clubs on school grounds after the regular school day if the school has established a limited open forum. *Westside Community Board of Education v. Mergens* (1990).

Please answer questions 7-10 with as much or as little detail as you wish.

- (7) Do you think that No Child Left Behind has had an overall positive or negative effect on public education. Please explain.

I believe “No Child Left Behind” has generated increased public interest in our public schools and that is a POSITIVE effect. The actual implementation, however, has generally been detrimental to public education. I think the “overall effect” varies from school district to school district and, in Howard County, I believe there have been sufficient tax resources to deal with “No child Left Behind” in an overall positive manner. I also think that we are the exception.

- (8) What is your view on teacher's unions?

I am pro-union and, even though teachers unions tend to be a bit wimpy, I still support them.

- (9) Describe one school system policy that needs changing? How would you change it?

Strategically, I support bringing technical education classes back to the local high school and, tactically, I support removing the algebra proficiency barrier for those students that want to be admitted to the career academies at the Applications and Research Laboratory (“ARL”). Two faces to a single policy, to wit: I support skills training.

- (10) Are standardized tests an adequate measure of student performance on the most important skills students should develop in school? If so, how so? If not, why not?

Standardized tests do have some roles to play in education. And, to be perfectly frank, for some students, in today’s economic environment, standardized tests can open gateways to educational opportunities that they might never have had otherwise. In particular, I believe standardized tests are an excellent opportunity for an academically gifted young person from an economically disadvantaged family to gain access to the financial aid necessary for that student to go to college. For many others, however, standardized tests do nothing but bring discouragement and frustration because the particular skills set they have to offer the world can’t be adequately measured by: “All of the above” or “None of the above.” Our schools must provide for all of our students regardless of differences in abilities.

**Allen Dyer, Candidate
Board of Education for Howard County**