

Democracy for Howard County 2006 Candidate Questionnaire

Response from Allen Dyer Candidate for Board of Education for Howard County

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

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. 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.

As a local board member, I am obligated to comply with the lawful regulations of the State Board of Education and I would do so. Further, as an individual, I personally agree that health education should be standardized at the state level.

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

Please see my response to Question (1).

- (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?

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). Currently, it is an open issue whether students can be forced to hear the recently added (1954) "under God" portion of the Pledge. Since the Pledge is a source of legal controversy, I would vote against including the Pledge as part of the official school day because I see no sense in exposing Howard County taxpayers to the cost of constitutional litigation.

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

As a board member, I would support moving the costs of all non-public school transportation out of the HCPSS budget and onto the Howard County government budget. The Board of Education should have no say regarding public transportation to private schools. I am particularly appalled by the current inclusion of religious school transportation within the HCPSS budget because the religious schools are, in effect, blackmailed into sending a representative to the annual county council public school budget hearing to testify in favor of the HCPSS school budget.

Assuming the cost of religious school transportation was purely a Howard County governmental budget issue, I do not believe the Board of Education should support or oppose the program.

As an citizen, however, I support publicly funded SCHOOL BUS 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, in my opinion, 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?

There is no place for creationism or “Intelligent Design” in the Maryland **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).

My personal religious beliefs, however, are none of your business.

Allen Dyer, Candidate
Board of Education for Howard County