

Howard County Issues Questionnaire Responses
from
Board of Education Candidate Allen Dyer
September 29, 2008

Issue 1. Expanding school year into summer, expanding school day or decreasing days in school

I am against mandatory year round schooling and the Board should take immediate steps to reverse the ongoing diminishment of the summer break by another day or two every year. Board approval of the school calendar activates mandatory school attendance enforced by fines of \$100 per day and imprisonment of 30 days. EDUCATION ARTICLE § 7-301. This is a heavy responsibility and the Board should not engage in willy nilly “tweaking.”

I am for voluntary summer school classes for students who need a continuing academic experience as well as for those students desiring to take courses during the summer that they didn’t have time to take during the regular school year.

The Board of Education should also study the costs involved if the school day was lengthened since a longer school day would make many more options available to our students and enrich their K-12 experience. If the estimated costs are not prohibitive, the Board should then engage the community in an exploration of all of the tradeoffs involved before voting on whether to expand the school day.

Issue 2. Middle school sports

I support school athletics and, as a parent, I served seven years on the board of the River Hill Boosters. Beyond the immediate health benefit of sports activity is the long term benefit of a habit of sports activity. For example, the middle school sports program should include at least one fitness for life activity such as handball, squash, golf, tennis and swimming.

We can, and should, do a better job of providing opportunities for all of our middle school students to engage in properly supervised athletics and the cost of participation in sports should not be a barrier to any student in Howard County. As Gen. Douglas MacArthur emphasized: "Upon the fields of friendly strife are sown the seeds, that upon other fields, on other days, will bear the fruits of victory."

Issue 3. Vocational Training

Vocational/technical education is an effective strategy for increasing student engagement and improving attendance. The “all kids are college bound” mind set needs adjustment — we need, and our students need, technical education involving hands-on skills at every Howard County high school. Theory alone is not enough.

Issue 4. Half days on the school calendar

Half days are a serious problem for working parents and an inefficient use of student and teacher time. Reducing the number of half days would increase learning time and reduce the risk of our students being home alone and unsupervised.

Issue 5. Funding for aging schools - Mt. Hebron building, mice infestation in new Reservoir High

I opposed the decision to “renovate” rather than rebuild Mt. Hebron High School. I believe the decision to renovate rather than rebuild was driven by a lack of funds and I preferred delaying the decision until sufficient funds were available to rebuild Mt. Hebron in compliance with the LEED environmental standards. We must plan for the long term.

Mice infestation is unacceptable. Caution, however, must be exercised in any attempt to combat any infestation because some of our students have strong sensitivities to many common pesticides and rodent poisons. Our schools must be safe for all students.

Issue 6. Transfer tax to support school funding

The Board of Education does not have statutory authority to levy taxes. Furthermore, before supporting any tax increase, the Board of Education should make the budget more accessible to the public and comb through it to understand exactly why the money we have is not enough. After all efforts to economize are taken, if a funding shortage still exists, I would support an increase to the transfer tax because you don’t have to be a realtor to know that the price of a house is directly associated with the quality of nearby public schools.

Issue 7. Restoring recess

Kids need time to eat and time to work off energy and if we don’t provide an outlet for their pent up energy we make the job of teaching those students doubly difficult. The National Association for the Education of Children reports that recess play is an active form of learning that unites mind, body & spirit; reduces school tension; permits the expression of emotional aspects of the day; develops cooperation, helping others, sharing, and problem solving; sharpens perceptual abilities; and, improves the child’s ability to

navigate the real world safely.

Finally, from a purely economic perspective, if our students don't have adequate recess, we fail to get the full benefit of our staff's professional training because the students are so restless that teaching time is turned into "settle down" time.

Issue 8. Method of decisions regarding admin and teacher placement

Currently, the lowest scoring schools have the newest teachers because, over the years, teachers acquire seniority and tend to migrate away from the schools where they are most needed. We need to get maximum benefit from our professional resources. The Board of Education can help by establishing an incentive system that the Superintendent can use to precisely position our best teachers where they are most needed.

Thank you. Allen Dyer