

# The People's Voice, LLC

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3205 B Corporate Court Ellicott City, MD 21042

2018 Howard County Questionnaire Board  
of Education Candidates

Candidate: Robert W. Miller

1. Why are you running for this office? What qualifications do you uniquely bring to hold this office?

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I retired in 2015 after 34 years of teaching in the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS). I taught at elementary, middle, and high school levels, as I was the band director at Hammond Middle School from 1985-2015, at Hammond Elementary School from 1985-1988, and at Howard High School from 1981-1985. My daughter is a teacher in our school system and my son is a student at College Park; both attended Bryant Woods Elementary School, Wilde Lake Middle School, and Wilde Lake High School. I have a BS in Music Education and a BS in Psychology, as well as an M.Ed. in Music Education, all from College Park. I was an adjunct professor at Howard Community College from 1984-1999. I directed summer band camps through Howard Community College from 1992-1996 and the Department of Recreation and Parks from 1997-2006, and I directed the Columbia Concert Band and Jazz Ensemble (adult community bands) from 1989-2000. I presently teach private percussion students (and have done so for over 40 years) and direct the Columbia Big Band (adult community jazz ensemble). Since I retired, I have been following our Board of Education and related issues with the hope of becoming a member of the Board. I have observed most Operating Budget Review Committee meetings for over a year, and I have been a member of the Community Advisory Council during this school year.

Though overall we have an excellent school system, I would like to help bring about improvements. During my tenure with the school system, I have seen educational initiatives come and go, many of which have had negative effects. Being that I have a perspective shaped from working “inside” the school system until 2015 as a teacher and from “outside” the school system as a parent and in the community, I believe I am positioned to help bring about positive change and to prioritize initiatives, anticipate unintended consequences, and thoughtfully solve problems when making decisions. Presently, I would like to help to bring about change regarding excessive standardized testing of students, a poorly-conceived teacher evaluation procedure, financial management inefficiencies, Common Core implementation, Special Education implementation, behavior management procedures, student service requirements, the propensity to implement programs without sufficient proof of effectiveness, etc. I also want the school system to focus more on the “intersection of students and teachers” and supporting and enabling educators to do their jobs as well as they can, removing unproductive time-wasting activities from educators and enabling them to focus on quality teaching, provide individual assistance to struggling students, and increase collaboration with parents. I would like to see increased expectations of elementary school students regarding their organization skills, and I would like to see the school system use natural opportunities to reinforce these as well as attributes like integrity, dependability, and the like that will increase students’ opportunities for success. I also believe that technology can be harnessed in ways that can more effectively and efficiently assist student learning. I believe that increased respect for educators can help to achieve some of these goals as well as encourage students to value their education. I hope to be a positive force in making our school system a place where students will be well-prepared to pursue their passions and live fulfilling lives.

2. Describe why you feel you have a viable campaign.

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I was a candidate for the Howard County Board of Education in 2016, and though I was a first-time candidate and did not have endorsements from the Howard County Education Association (HCEA) or The People's Voice / Ethics Ballot (TPV), I still received 40,484 votes (I would have needed about 18,000 more to have been elected). Also, I received more votes than two of the incumbents in the primary election, which enabled me to move on to the general election when they could not. This campaign cycle, I was early-endorsed by HCEA, and in combination with some campaign experience and name recognition, I believe that I have a viable campaign. (Additionally, in 2016, I was endorsed for the primary election by the Chinese American Parent Association (CAPA), and for the general election by African Americans in Howard County (AAIHC)). Financially, I have some leftover campaign materials and the availability of some personal funds to supplement my campaign beyond donations.

3. How do you believe one eliminates the appearance of conflicts regarding campaign contributions?

I believe that limiting individual campaign contributions would help to eliminate the appearance of conflicts regarding campaign contributions. For my campaign, donations from individuals will only be accepted up to \$100 (cumulatively) for each election, as I would not want to appear to be beholden to anyone when making decisions. (This is stated on my website under "Get Involved" / "Donations".) The situation with PACs is a bit more challenging, as, for example, I value HCEA's endorsement very much; to me, the endorsement is more important and meaningful than contributions. That said, if I am to accept contributions from a PAC over \$100, I would have to be comfortable being associated with that PAC in order to avoid the appearance of conflicts. As an illustration, though I will be making decisions independently, my guess is that most of them would be in agreement with most HCEA positions, as I want to be supportive of educators. That said, being a person of integrity is very important to me; I am confident that people who know me would vouch for this. So if I felt that the appearance of conflicts regarding campaign contributions from PACs became an impediment to my effectiveness, I would have the option of returning the contributions. Furthermore, theoretically, if an anti-education PAC wanted to contribute to my campaign, I would have to refuse contributions over \$100, because if I theoretically started voting against supporting educators there would be an appearance of a conflict of interest.

4. If you are elected, what are your top priorities for 2019? Discuss at least three areas of concern for The Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) and how you would address them.

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1) Focus school system efforts on the intersection of students and teachers, thus reducing instructional and preparation time lost to overemphasis on standardized testing, a poorly-conceived teacher evaluation procedure, unproven fads and initiatives, and unnecessary paperwork. This time could be used to provide one-on-one assistance for students struggling with basic skills, organization, and/or social and emotional challenges; it could help to eliminate achievement gaps and other negative consequences that can accompany students who fall behind and/or have difficulties. A climate where administrative / central office personnel serve educators, students, and parents, and not vice versa, would be essential to the success of this initiative.

2) Enable the cultivation of a partner-like atmosphere between educators and parents based on mutual respect and concern for students, with improved communication made possible by the reduction of time-wasting policies and procedures as described above. This partner-like atmosphere should also be cultivated between the Board of Education / Central Office and the students, parents, staff, and community they serve; transparent, honest, respectful, and responsive communication will enhance this atmosphere.

3) Increase prioritization of social and emotional learning. It is vital that students do not just gain knowledge and skills, but also become people who have integrity, self-discipline, and empathy; are ethical, responsible, and kind; and have an appreciation of diversity and an ability to work well with others of varied backgrounds. I'm not referring to "fluff," but to an environment that is supportive and supported, where "who you are" is even more important than "what you know."

Please note that these priorities are primarily classroom-based and require educator time to be successful. Enabling these priorities, among others, should drive many Board of Education decisions regarding the budget, staffing, and the functioning of the Central Office; furthermore, these initiatives must occur within the framework of a responsibly balanced budget (which should be an obvious priority). We must remember that it is in the classroom where "the rubber meets the road."

5. What do you believe are the strengths and weaknesses of the current Board of Education, and Superintendent?

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**Board of Education Strengths --** The current Board of Education, as an entity, has demonstrated considerable courage, conviction, and heart when dealing with challenging issues. They (as an entity) showed great fortitude when refusing to accept what the former Superintendent was doing and in bringing in a very capable replacement. They have attempted to balance what is good for individual citizens with what is good for the community as a whole. They have worked toward balancing the budget in a responsible way, given the challenges under which they were working. The Board has made great strides in increasing transparency and responsiveness to the community. The members have varied backgrounds, but have worked well together and with our new Superintendent in terms of civility and effectiveness.

**Board of Education Weaknesses --** Some members occasionally appear to be too easily swayed by public opinion / pressure (though I do appreciate that they are considering it). Sometimes I get the feeling that important decisions are made by members without having all of the information or perspective necessary in order to make the best decisions. At times I feel that they are more reactive than proactive. Overall, I feel that the present Board, as a whole, is very good, but these are a few areas where I believe improvement, could be made.

**Superintendent Strengths --** Dr. Martirano has faced great challenges and addressed them in ways that I consider to have been intelligent, thoughtful, and considerate. Though it is not reasonable to expect him to satisfy everyone (including me) all of the time, he seems very open to listening and considering the thoughts of others. He appears to do this in a manner that I think fits our county well. He seems to sincerely be very student-oriented, which is as it should be for a school system superintendent. His nature has been very cooperative, transparent, and respectful, yet he has demonstrated courage and decisiveness when appropriate. It is beneficial to our school system for our superintendent to have good interpersonal skills when working with parents, students, teachers, our board, our county executive and county council, etc., and this trait seems to be an impressive strength of Dr. Martirano. I believe that his leadership style, work ethic, and enthusiasm also add to his effectiveness. So far, I have been very impressed.

**Superintendent Weaknesses --** Occasionally, though his desire to enable public input is commendable, sometimes he appears to do so prematurely (before the public has enough information to provide sufficiently relevant feedback, or while the target is still moving). On rare occasion, I recall him mentioning an idea that may not have been fully considered, or doing something without fully anticipating the consequences. Overall, though, especially given that he has only had the position for a relatively short amount of time, I think that he has done exceptionally well.

6. How would you exercise oversight of the HCPSS budget, after it has been approved?

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I think that oversight of the present budget and creation of the next budget should be more of an ongoing joint venture. I believe we should start looking at the following year's budget, at least at a programmatic level, much earlier than is the present practice, so questions can be investigated, answers can be considered, and decisions can be made without being under as much pressure. During this process, I would, along with the other Board members, want to be investigating the efficacy of the present budget while, with input from staff, considering ways of improving the use of our funds along with improving our program implementation. I would also like to see the budget document organized in such a way that it would be more clearly understandable to the Board members as well as to interested community members. For example, if staff have been moved from one program to another, this, along with the accompanying funds, should be easier to follow. I would also like to see a reduction in the amount of boastfulness in the document and an increase in explanations of how funding is used in various programs. I would like program managers to speak with the Board throughout the year, and in addition to asking them if they have what they need, I think it would also be useful to ask what would be at the top of their wish lists, realizing that budget restrictions may prevent fruition. I think this could be helpful in long-range planning as well as in helping us visualize what improvement can look like. Meanwhile, I would want to involve our internal auditor when overseeing the execution of the present budget and getting feedback about the possibilities of increasing efficiency and effectiveness. Also, since our Operating Budget Review Committee is now a year-round entity, I would like to get their input on a regular basis, as well as involving them when more specific feedback could be helpful.

7. The HCPSS has experienced less socio-economic diversity of population in schools. Discuss related concerns and how you would address them. Include your ideas about how to provide equity in the HCPSS.

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To a certain extent, HCPSS needs to compensate for a lack of diversity brought on by issues related to housing and zoning. As a member of the Board, I would want to be a proponent of county regulations that would better enable a diverse population to live, work, and be educated together throughout the county. That said, given our current situation, the Board should do what it can to bring about more socio-economically diverse schools when redistricting. Though the decisions must be based on Policy 6010, the criteria in the policy were not assigned weights, so increasing diversity in schools can be an overarching priority as long as the policy is reasonably followed and the criteria reasonably respected. Meanwhile, I would support courses and general instruction that enable students to learn about and appreciate diverse cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives. Though it is disappointing to say, it is probably unrealistic to think that HCPSS can, by itself, produce complete equity. It probably cannot fully compensate for differences such as pre-school experiences; family prioritization of education; financial ability of families to provide activities such as camps, tutoring, private instruction, athletic participation, and enrichment classes; time parents spend with students; etc. Meanwhile, like perfection, though it may not be attainable, it is still worth pursuing, and in doing so the benefits can be tremendous. Following are some ways HCPSS could pursue achieving equity:

- Provide more staffing, equipment, etc., when needed at schools with student populations that face extra challenges
- Prioritize one-on-one assistance for students struggling with basic skills; not accepting non-mastery (for more information, please go to my website, [miller4boe.org](http://miller4boe.org), and click on "Insisting on Basic Skills Mastery")
- Provide opportunities for enrichment by making available scholarships, funded by community organizations, foundation grants, individuals, businesses, and HCPSS, to be used for enrichment, tutoring, etc.
- Enable volunteer, service, and internship opportunities for high school students to provide enrichment, tutoring, etc. to younger or less experienced students
- Ensure to the extent possible that basic needs are met for all students (food, shelter, clothing)
- Ensure to the extent possible that educational needs are met for all students (computers/tablets, internet access, organization-related materials such as binders)
- Provide appropriate instruction and supports to special education students
- Provide quality training for staff members that will enhance their abilities to support students with challenges
- Ensure transportation is provided so outside-of-the-school-day activities are available to all
- Prioritize meeting the individual needs of each student.

8. Do you believe the HCPSS budget should have a lower level of increase, or be fully funded? If fully funded, where do you suggest the County budget cut elsewhere to accommodate? If lowered, where do you suggest the HCPSS budget be cut?

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Being that I am not presently on the Board, I feel somewhat limited in responding to this question, because if I had been able to investigate questions and concerns as a Board member can, I might have found some areas where I felt confident the budget should be cut. That said, I thought that the present Board did a pretty admirable job given the agonizing challenges they faced. From my present perspective, I would probably support fully funding the budget, along with encouraging the restoration of funds to return class sizes to the FY18 level. It appears that the County budget tends to have a cushion built in. I think that, given the circumstances, it would be reasonable to ask that some of that cushion be sacrificed for this purpose this year. I would also encourage the County government to explore and consider pursuing other revenue sources. A high-quality school system should be a priority for our county. The future success of our most important resource, our children, to a large extent depends on quality of our schools. Even from a financial standpoint, a high-quality school system is beneficial when it comes to property values, revenue growth, attractiveness to businesses, etc. Additionally, our schools play a large part in enabling our communities to thrive. Thus, though I believe that HCPSS should be fiscally responsible and efficient with taxpayer money, compromising the quality of our school system should not be an acceptable option.

9. Where do you think the next high school(s) should be built? Why? In what order?

On March 8th, the Board of Education chose Mission Road as the sight for HS13. Regarding what I would have chosen previous to that Board meeting, without knowing all of the environmental study results and Mission Road quarry blasting test results and being able to discuss them with experts, more about the White property situation, Route 1 corridor growth expectations over the next several decades, long and short term expectations regarding student transportation, final costs, details that have been discussed in closed meetings, etc., I wouldn't feel that I could have responsibly answered that question. The answers to the above unknowns would have likely determined my responses regarding the location of HS13 more than any preferences I might have had, and there were pros and cons for both locations. I also think that some tentative decisions should have been made regarding the building of a Career and Technical Education high school and an additional eastern elementary and middle school and their possible locations and timing, as these should possibly have been considerations regarding the location of HS13, too. Meanwhile, if both properties are found to be safe and appropriate, I think that it would be wise to consider purchasing both.

10. How would you remediate overcrowding in schools?

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As a member of our Board of Education, I would advocate an approach that includes redistricting as well as programmatic strategies such as strategic placement of dual-enrollment and possibly world language immersion and CTE (Career and Technical Education) programs. Some redistricting-related considerations would be:

- Enhance public awareness that the quality of a school, and the suitability of a school for an individual student, cannot and should not be determined by test scores, and that highly successful students graduate every year from every Howard County school
- While keeping Policy 6010 in mind and maximizing target utilizations of our building capacities, attempt to balance demographics between schools when reasonable, with attention to keeping feeder systems and communities intact as much as is feasible, allowing walkers to remain walkers, and judiciously minimizing transportation time
- Consider long-range school capacities and move students in ways that will fill those capacities while strategically improving demographic balance
- At the minimum, mandatory redistricting should not occur for high school seniors and juniors; the redistricting of rising 5th and 8th graders should be avoided when possible; and redistricting should be phased in when viable, focusing on rising kindergarteners, 6th, and 9th graders
- In the possibly not too distant future, begin to consider possible impacts of driverless vehicles when making long-range plans regarding school planning, transportation, and redistricting
- Improve planning/funding so we do not have schools that are severely over-capacity in the future.

Lastly, I have found that for the great majority of students who are transferred, after three weeks of school if they were offered the choice of going back or remaining, they would remain at their “new” school. They’ve made (or kept) friends, gotten used to their teachers, and learned new routines. That said, there could be a small number, for example, of students with emotional challenges, who would be better off in their old school. I believe that there should be some mechanism (e.g., appeals board), that, after three weeks, could allow a very limited number of students to return to their “old” schools, and it should be publicized in order to ease some concerns, too.

11. What time do you think Elementary, Middle and High Schools in the HCPSS should start the day? If any changes are proposed, how would you accommodate funding needs to implement?

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This is a challenging situation, as different families have varied situations and preferences. I do believe the research regarding the benefits of later high school start times, but I understand concerns about older students being home for siblings, after-school activities, jobs, etc. Unfortunately, the options that have been presented for high schools to start later in a way that would likely be palatable to most families tend to be the most expensive, due to overlapping bus routes and the resulting need for more buses and drivers. I think that, for successful implementation of later school start times, community support would be vital, in terms of garnering support for the plan's continuation as well as its funding. As the pared-down budget presently stands, I would have trouble advocating for something else to be cut in order to bring about later high school start times (this dilemma is probably why so many Board members who support the initiative have not voted for it). I think that, for the effort to be successful, either specific funding would have to be provided to HCPSS by the county government, or a creative approach would be needed. An example of a creative approach would be the exploration of expanding the school day on an optional basis for elementary school students; then the resulting later bus runs could open up possibilities for later high school start times. World language instruction, academic enrichment, arts enrichment, tutoring, sports and other play activities are examples of offerings that could occur for participants, and fees could be charged on a sliding scale, making funding more realistic. Some of that funding, in lieu of other after-care costs, would essentially help to subsidize the later bus runs that would reduce the need for more bus runs and drivers, thus reducing the potential cost of a later high school start time implementation. At the same time, it would provide options for world language instruction and other quality after-school instruction for students. Meanwhile, to respond to the question about the time I think that elementary, middle, and high schools should start the day, I would suggest keeping the present high school then middle school then elementary school order intact, due to the desire of many parents to have older students home before younger students (though I think that starting middle schools before high schools could be a viable option), and due to after-school sports schedules and the like. That said, if it can be accomplished, I would ideally like to see high schools start about 8:15am, middle schools between 8:15am and 8:30am, and elementary schools between 8:45am and 9:15am.

12. Do you believe that local Boards of Education in MD should have the right to terminate their Superintendents for cause? If the law changes, what procedures do you suggest for retaining due process?

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Yes, I do. I might not have felt this way had I not witnessed so many issues with Dr. Foose's tenure, and having the school system endure the gridlock that was occurring between her and the Board of Education for three more years seemed like a losing proposition in many ways for most stakeholders. That said, I have heard that other boards in the state do not want this responsibility, and that some don't see much point since the involved superintendent could sue, and the case could drag on for a long time (we saw an example of this with Dr. Foose). Though I think they have a valid concern, I still think that allowing a local board to terminate their superintendent would expedite the process somewhat over the present arrangement of only enabling the State Superintendent to terminate local superintendents. Another problem with the present arrangement is that it leaves a lot of power in the hands of one person, the State Superintendent. I have heard it said that one of the reasons for the present arrangement is to avoid instability in school systems if, for example, the "politics" of the board were to change after an election. I can understand this desire, but having a board and superintendent butting heads for four years does not seem desirable, either. Therefore, though I can see two valid sides to this issue, at this point, as school boards are able to hire superintendents, I think they should have the power to terminate them, too. Meanwhile, regarding due process, the involved superintendent would have the right to a hearing before the State Superintendent, or, if legislation HB103 is passed, the county board of education. If the matter is still not settled, it could go to arbitration or a lawsuit could ensue. Of course, these arrangements are not optimal for school systems either. I would be interested in seeing legislation that would enable a board to "buy out" a superintendent, along with some type of financial limit so the amount would not be unreasonable.

13. Do you believe the Board of Education members should be elected countywide or by district? Why? If by district, which type of districting system is best? Do you believe concerns about accountability are more easily addressed with districting?

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My view on this subject is somewhat dependent on the implementation of the relevant legislation, which does not specifically address primary election protocol. In general, I believe that Board members should be elected at large countywide, though I am not opposed to a system where each district would have one Board member (for example, in which the highest vote-getter in each district would win). I believe that arguments for election by district regarding the challenges of running a countywide campaign, the increasing of accountability, and the benefits that would come from having each district represented on the Board, are valid. There are legitimate pros and cons for both points of view. But regarding the campaign challenges, we continue to have a lot of candidates willing to run in a countywide race. Regarding the need for more accountability, I believe that the Board's cluster representative system could be greatly improved (addressed in the 4<sup>th</sup> bullet below) with resulting improvements in accountability. Depending how it is implemented, my concerns with a districted system could include:

- With districting, the Board could become more parochial and biased. As an illustration, it might be more difficult for a Board member from Elkridge's district and a Board member from Jessup's district to make a decision about HS13 solely on what's best for the county's students and not feel a duty to represent his/her constituents. This is an often-considered question in politics... should elected representatives represent their constituents or make their own decisions? If their primary concern is about being re-elected, then they might choose the former, and if that transpires, instead of Board members doing what is in the county's best interest, they could choose to do what is in their own and/or their constituents' best interest. I don't believe this conflict would be good for the Board or the people they serve. Even the appearance of conflict of interest can cause problems, as was evidenced in complaints made about the AAC (Attendance Area Committee) this past summer.
- With districting, depending on the implementation of the legislation, parents may not be able to vote for the Board member who represents the schools their students attend (which could be in a different district than where they reside).
- With districting, there could be a situation where the "best" (or most popular) candidates cannot serve because too many may come from the same district.
- Districting could actually backfire and reduce accountability. For example, if there is a problem at an individual school or area, presently all seven Board members are responsible for fixing the problem. With districting, four Board members would essentially have no constituent responsibility for schools in that area of the county. By extensively publicizing cluster representative assignments through school and community channels, and by ending the practice of annually changing cluster assignments, Board members' ability to be connected to, knowledgeable about, and responsible for specific areas of the county could be greatly enhanced. Citizens could more easily identify and contact their cluster's Board member when needed.

Though there are pros and cons, overall I believe that members of our Board of Education, who make countywide decisions regarding our countywide school system, should be responsible to a countywide electorate, and should not have to decide between what is best for the county and what will get them re-elected by their district. The countywide at large system seems to have proven to be reasonably able to produce change that addresses community concerns, and I would be comfortable supporting the "old" system or the "new" system if the latter involves each district having at least one member on the Board as

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described above. I would not be comfortable with a system that does not enable each voter to vote for any county Board of Education candidate. Though districting has its benefits, I believe that countywide at large Board of Education elections have greater benefits and fewer drawbacks, and thus are preferable.

14. What percentage of overcapacity do you think should close schools to development in the Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance? The maximum number of years of halting development in an overcrowded school is 4, should that number be changed? If so, why?

Though I would have been happy to see a 100% limit, I feel that limits that were voted in (ES-105%, MS-110%, HS-115%) are within reason given the current circumstances. I would have liked to see the maximum number of years of halting development in an overcrowded school be closer to 8. As an illustration, if we decided in 2018 to use Troy Hill as a location for a high school and had to use eminent domain, it would likely not be completed until 2026 (for reference, please see slide 8 of:

[https://www.boarddocs.com/mabe/hcpssmd/Board.nsf/files/AWNRDE6AB75C/\\$file/03%2008%202018%20HS13%20Site%20Selection%20PowerPoint.pdf](https://www.boarddocs.com/mabe/hcpssmd/Board.nsf/files/AWNRDE6AB75C/$file/03%2008%202018%20HS13%20Site%20Selection%20PowerPoint.pdf)). Even though the point could be made that planning should be done further ahead of time, the funds for multiple simultaneous projects cannot be assured. Therefore, I feel that 8 years would be a justifiable compromise that would provide developers with reasonable access and the school system with a reasonable timetable.

15. What is your position on the burden of proof in Special Education litigation?

Though I feel that there are legitimate views on both sides of this issue, I lean toward changing current legislation and placing the burden of proof on the school system. My position on this issue has evolved as I have learned more about challenges that parents of special education students face, and about the consequences for the school system seeming to be within reason. Generally, in order to achieve the best outcomes for students, it is important to have an alliance between the parents and the school system. This would be difficult to produce if parents see themselves as a "David" and the school system as "Goliath." Also, some parents do not have the resources to adequately present their side in a legal setting. The change of burden of proof would also likely encourage the school system to want to work together more with parents. Though I would not want the school system to be exploited, from what I have seen, I don't think that this would be a common occurrence. For these reasons, I think it would be reasonable to shift the burden of proof to the school system.

16. What is your position regarding cell phone usage by students in school?

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My position regarding cell phone usage by students in school is somewhat dependent on the technology that is provided by the school system, and I think that subject should be explored further. That said, presently the school system does not provide “devices” (desktop computers, laptops, Chromebooks, tablets, or phones) to every student. As long as this situation exists, given the learning opportunities that can be accessed with technology, I think that students should either be permitted to bring devices (including phones) to classes as long as they are silenced, or they should store the silenced devices in lockers or other containers in classrooms unless they are instructed by a teacher to bring them for use in class. In either case, students should not use cell phones during classes unless instructed to do so by the teacher. I think a compromise could be appropriate for lunch/recess, for example, two days a week students could use cell phones during lunch/recess, and the other three days they may not; it should be explained that conversation is encouraged on those three days, and why. Cell phones should not be used in halls between classes, since they could exacerbate congestion and accidents. Options should be considered to assist teachers in spotting inappropriate use of cell phones and to act as a deterrent for students. One possibility could be installing convex mirrors in classrooms similar to those used to prevent shoplifting. Inappropriate use of cell phones would be reported to parents, and if it continued, the students in question would lose the privilege of bringing a device into the classroom. When needed for instructional reasons, HCPSS would need to provide devices for students who are not able to provide their own.

17. Describe positions you have taken, or votes you have made which you feel are the most important with regard to the position you seek. Describe how you championed these causes or how you publicized your position. Please also include information on any position or vote you made that you regret, or about which you feel differently.

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The "news" section of my website, [www.miller4boe.org/news](http://www.miller4boe.org/news), includes numerous positions I feel are important and links to public forums and hearings, newspaper op-eds, etc. where I have championed these positions. Other information about many positions I feel are important can be found at [www.miller4boe.org/positions](http://www.miller4boe.org/positions) in mostly narrative form (due to recent Board decisions, some updating will be done soon). I feel that determining which positions are the most important can vary with the subject and situation at hand, but if I had to choose one, it would probably be something like what I stated at the end of my op-ed from the February 16, 2016 issue of the Howard County Times, "If the school system does not act with integrity, how can the public be expected to trust it." That said, summarized priorities would generally include desires to:

1) Focus school system efforts on the intersection of students and teachers, thus reducing instructional and preparation time lost to overemphasis on standardized testing, a poorly-conceived teacher evaluation procedure, unproven fads and initiatives, and unnecessary paperwork. This time could be used to provide one-on-one assistance for students struggling with basic skills, organization, and/or social and emotional challenges; it could help to eliminate achievement gaps and other negative consequences that can accompany students who fall behind and/or have difficulties. A climate where administrative / central office personnel serve educators, students, and parents, and not vice versa, would be essential to the success of this initiative.

2) Enable the cultivation of a partner-like atmosphere between educators and parents based on mutual respect and concern for students, with improved communication made possible by the reduction of time-wasting policies and procedures as described above. This partner-like atmosphere should also be cultivated between the Board of Education / Central Office and the students, parents, staff, and community they serve; transparent, honest, respectful, and responsive communication will enhance this atmosphere.

3) Increase prioritization of social and emotional learning. It is vital that students do not just gain knowledge and skills, but also become people who have integrity, self-discipline, and empathy; are ethical, responsible, and kind; and have an appreciation of diversity and an ability to work well with others with varied backgrounds. I'm not referring to "fluff," but to an environment that is supportive and supported where "who you are" is even more important than "what you know."

Regarding positions about which I now feel differently, there are a couple that come to mind. My position regarding having a Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion evolved from feeling that we could just use our Cultural Proficiency staff for these efforts, to supporting the hiring of this Director, as I learned more about the magnitude of the need and the work of the Cultural Proficiency staff. Also, though I had not taken a position, my feelings about special education burden of proof have shifted from being somewhat unsure, toward placing the burden on the school system, as I learned more about the practice and further considered the consequences.

18. What specific actions have you taken that benefited the community, either as an elected official or as a county resident? Have you ever testified before the Howard County Board of Education? If so, describe positions you have taken.

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Regarding my “other life” outside of running for elected office, I hope that I have benefitted the community through teaching music and starting and/or directing community bands, as well as in some small ways associated with being a parent of children who attended HCPSS schools and were involved in arts and sports programs. Regarding my efforts running for elected office, I hope that being part of the conversation has benefitted the community. I have testified many times before the Howard County Board of Education; as mentioned in Question 17, several of my testimonies can be found in the “news” section of my website, [www.miller4boe.org/news](http://www.miller4boe.org/news). Other information about many positions I feel are important can be found at [www.miller4boe.org/positions](http://www.miller4boe.org/positions) in mostly narrative form (due to recent Board decisions, some updating will be done soon). Following are some very summarized examples of positions I have taken when testifying:

- Teacher input should be sought to determine the need for certain standardized tests.
- Openness and transparency should exist for all stakeholders, including staff.
- The teacher evaluation system should be revamped.
- Standardized testing has many negatives, and we should endeavor to reduce the instructional time and resources taken for the testing.
- Individualized assistance for hierarchical skill attainment and organization skills should be prioritized for struggling students.
- The ESM World Language Program is poorly implemented and ending it would be a prudent budgetary decision.
- The previous superintendent and BoE should openly answer budget-related questions from the County Executive, County Council, and community, and the community should be involved in problem-solving.
- The Gallup Strengths Initiative concept of focusing on the strong rather than what is wrong can have negative consequences for students and for problem-solving.
- A national superintendent search could be the wrong thing to do, especially when the interim superintendent has been “auditioning” for several months.

19. If you had to make School Budget cuts, what are the top three things you would NOT cut and the top three things you would? Why?

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Under the challenging circumstances the present Board was working under, I think they made reasonably prudent decisions overall. It's difficult to answer the question about what I would NOT cut, since there would be a very large number of items. Thus, as generalities, and recognizing that the decisions would not necessarily be "all or none," I would try to avoid cutting items that affect the "intersection of students and teachers," provide for student safety and health, or would cause a significant reduction in our ability to hire and retain a high-quality and diverse teaching staff. Regarding what I would cut, the list would likely include considerations of reducing Central Office costs, technology costs, and standardized testing costs, though I would want to do some research before making commitments regarding these, as the Central Office is in the process of being restructured, I would need to learn more about the consequences of reducing technology, and I would want to get teacher input before finalizing standardized testing decisions. (By the way, I think the present Board made the right decision by ending the ESM world language implementation, and if more funds became available, I would like the Board to focus on lowering class sizes.) My reasoning for my decisions is based on the importance of what happens in the classroom that is related to students and their teachers. I think it is interesting to compare the education of today's high school seniors and high school seniors in my graduation year, 1975. With the advances in information accessibility, productivity devices, and applications that have come into existence since 1975 (when they would have been considered science-fiction), one might expect our present-day high school graduates to have clearly superior educations than those of 4+ decades ago. In general, though, this does not seem to be the case, at least not to the extent that might be expected given the digital advancements. The rubber meets the road at the "intersection of students and teachers," and I believe it is important to keep this in mind when making budgetary decisions. (There is also an equity issue involved; students from families with financial challenges normally have disproportionately more negative consequences caused by larger class sizes, and have less ability to remediate them.)

20. How would you improve detection and response to bullying?

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Maryland's model to address bullying can be found at: <http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DSFSS/SSSP/ModelBullyingPolicy072016.pdf>. Meanwhile, the challenges caused by bullying are often greater than they may seem on the surface, and solutions to these challenges are often not "one-size-fits-all." In terms of detection, it should be realized that, to an observer at one single point in time, there is not always a clear line between bullying and teasing; without knowing what has happened in the past, an observer may not be able to accurately detect one from the other. I know firsthand what it is like to be a teacher standing in a hallway, hearing two students I do not know, and wondering if bullying was occurring or if it was teasing. This was in a school where speaking to the students at the time in this situation would likely have been frowned upon by administration if done too often, as being to class on time so instruction was not missed was a high priority. Often I wouldn't have been able to investigate at the time anyway because my own class might have been entering my room (sometimes with 70-80 middle school band students, occasionally with their own issues). So, for the situation to improve regarding bullying, detection should become a priority. Additionally, students must be made aware that they had better know another student *very* well before teasing or "joking" with them, and *know* that the other student realizes that they are being teased, because if it is not the case, what they are doing could be considered bullying. Self-reporting and "see-something-say-something" reporting should be encouraged. Every student should learn at least the standard consequences for bullying and the reasons for them. Teachers should communicate with each other when bullying could be suspected; this is important to help detect situations where a student is being bullied but is reluctant to admit it, and communication would be helpful to evaluate potential bullying as it had occurred over time. Relevant records should be kept and made accessible to those who are appropriate. Some teacher training should occur, too, especially for new teachers. How bullying is responded to could also assist in detection, if the response is explained to students in the context of problem-solving than punishment. Responses could vary based on the specific situation. I generally favor a restorative justice approach. When possible, I would like to see problems solved and lessons learned. Regardless of how things play out, we must be careful to not penalize the victim when responding. We should also realize that the offender may have underlying problems that should be addressed and try to attend to them. Unless there is a safety issue, out-of-school suspension should be avoided, as it doesn't normally help to fix the problem and often causes many others. If school-based efforts are unsuccessful, community-based resources should be used. Parents of both the victim and the offender should be involved from early in the process. Reducing/eliminating bullying is a time-intensive process, but the result could be life-enhancing for both the victim and the offender.

By Authority, The People's Voice PAC, Lisa Markovitz, Treasurer