

# The People's Voice, LLC

## Ethics Ballot™

3205 B Corporate Court Ellicott City, MD 21042

March 5, 2018

### 2018 Howard County Candidate Questionnaire

#### Board of Education Candidates

Thank you for taking the time to fill out The People's Voice (TPV) / Ethics Ballot 2018 Candidate Questionnaire which will be used in the TPV endorsement process.

**Publication:** Your answers are considered "on the record." They will be circulated to our members and may be published on the [TPV website](#).

**Endorsement Process:** See [www.EthicsBallot.com](http://www.EthicsBallot.com) for more information on Board Members and click "Ethics Ballot" tab for endorsement criteria details.

Please return questionnaires via email to [ethicsballot@gmail.com](mailto:ethicsballot@gmail.com) by **Thursday, March 15, 2018 at 1:00PM**. Please email any questions you have about this questionnaire. A Board Member will respond.

#### Candidate Information

Name	Danny Mackey
Website	dannymackey.org
Phone	(443) 980-8040
Campaign Account Name	Committee to Elect Danny Mackey
Treasurer	Steve Stone
Chairman	Danny Mackey
Campaign Manager	Danny Mackey (working on recruiting one)
Funds Balance	Approx. \$2000

### 2018 Howard County Questionnaire Board of Education Candidates

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

I am running for this office because I care deeply about the well being of the students in Howard County and the overall health of the school system that prepared me for college and my career. I want to serve and give back to my community. Perhaps my greatest experience that qualifies me to serve on the Howard County Board of Education lasted 13 years and culminated in May of 2012 with my graduation from Wilde Lake High School. I spent Kindergarten through my Senior year of high school as a student in the Howard County Public School System and am the only candidate who has recent experience as a student in HCPSS. This uniquely qualifies me to keep our students in the forefront of my decision making as a member of the Board of Education. Further, I have been involved in education advocacy for several years motivated by my experience as a student, my relationship with my sister and mother both of whom are employees of HCPSS, and my desire to see our school system be the best it can be. As a college senior in 2016 I regularly returned to Howard County to testify at public forum and work with stakeholders to facilitate change. I was vocal in opposing what to me seemed to be a systematic dismantling of trust between the school system and the community. My experiences testifying as well as my continued involvement in advocacy surrounding HCPSS have allowed me to coordinate with educators, parents, and advocates from many areas of the county. These experiences have provided me with institutional knowledge of the system that will allow me to hit the ground running as a member of the Board of Education acting immediately to start tackling the problems facing our schools.

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

Having experience on multiple local campaigns I understand what it takes to win a countywide race. While having a strong platform and being well-versed on the many issues facing the school system is critical for any Board of Education candidate, equally important to winning is having a concrete plan on how to engage voters through multiple outlets. Our campaign has an aggressive, well-rounded plan to win in the Primary and again in the General Election. Our plan includes fundraising targets, voter contact targets and strategies, goals and strategies for volunteer coordination, as well as a multimedia outreach plan. Name recognition is key in Board of Education races. From my advocacy experience in education I have name recognition amongst the many education-motivated voters in the county. We have a plan to expand this base so that voters have seen the name 'Danny Mackey' several times before they walk into a ballot box in June.

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

In the countywide format, campaigns are expensive and candidates accept large donations from individuals and business to further their ability to spread their message. This can lead to, at a minimum, the appearance of a conflict of interest. The best way to eliminate any appearance of conflict of interest is to participate in an exercise that all elected officials should do: clearly explain to their constituents why they vote or advocate the way they do. If elected to the Board of Education I will never leave members of the community wondering why I land where I do on any issue. My reasoning and position will be available to the public. This practice will allow the community to understand the thought process that led me to a given position and further allow them to evaluate the merits of my reasoning. I believe this practice will eliminate the appearance of any conflict.

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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.

### Priorities:

- 1) Influencing policy to encourage a learning environment that is safe and fosters positive mental health amongst students and staff, including our special education community where we will need to ensure that our investments are bold and meeting the needs of students and staff.
- 2) Promoting equity in program and academia throughout the system for both students and staff. This includes evaluating the effects of programs on student achievement, evaluating the effectiveness of the professional development opportunities offered to HCPSS staff, and working diligently to think outside the box in offering students avenues for success in education through pursuing vocational opportunities or other achievements outside of the traditional college-bound path. A well-developed approach toward equity is critical in addressing the achievement gap that continues to pervade the system.
- 3) Working with the Superintendent, fellow members of the Board, fellow elected officials at the State and local level, and members of the community to address financial crises facing the school system in a responsible manner. This will include helping to repair and establish relationships between the Board of Education and local elected officials and the community as well as influencing policy to be crafted in a manner that increases trust in the system by easing access to information and preventing the mistakes of our past from reoccurring.

### Areas of Concern:

- 1) The achievement gap. Equity is a main tenet of our campaign. HCPSS must work with students early on to ensure they are keeping up with their peers and offer opportunities for professional development in cultural competency to our staff. Implementing restorative justice practices will also help address this issue.
- 2) The state of Special Education. Special Education seemed to be under deliberate attack by previous administrations. We must make sure that we are protecting our most vulnerable youth. I would advocate for strong investments in Special Education including increased staffing and stronger professional development opportunities to ensure that our staff understand our obligations as a system, the programming they provide their students, and are prepared to offer students opportunities for growth.
- 3) I do not believe there has been significant enough policy change to prevent the mistakes of our past from reoccurring. I would like to initiate a study of policy that identifies loopholes exploited by previous administrations and work to close those loopholes to help restore trust between HCPSS and the community.

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

Board of Education: I believe that the Board of Education did an excellent job in transitioning between administrations but has seemed less than enthusiastic about large undertakings since Dr. Martirano's arrival. Further, the Board seems very susceptible to manipulation by well-organized groups regardless of whether or not they are representative of the opinion of the county at large. During the previous administration community input was not considered whatsoever. During the process of making significant decisions in recent history it seems as though the pendulum has swung the other way. It has been joked about that 'if you buy a colored t shirt the Board of Education will listen to you.' In the future I hope the Board of Education can find a healthy balance that values community input without only acknowledging those with the loudest voices. The Board of Education has provided an excellent example for civility and public service in recent months. It has been a refreshing breath of fresh air. I hope the trend of respectful governance continues.

Superintendent: Given the circumstances, Dr. Martirano inherited the most difficult job in the County and has handled himself well. From the start he has been proactive in restoring community trust and coming to terms with the realities of our past. He is very clearly student-centered and enjoys visiting our schools; this is an important trait in a school Superintendent. He is a strong leader, but this trait is as much an asset as it is a trait that requires attention. I would like to see Dr. Martirano improve his communication with the Board of Education. During large decision making processes, specifically redistricting, Dr. Martirano has a tendency to take a very executive-level course of action and propose his plans to the public without proper consultation with the Board of Education. This in turn creates more difficulty navigating complex issues as the Superintendent's proposals can leave the Board of Education to deal with difficult realities not addressed by preliminary plans released by the Superintendent. This speaks to the importance of the check-and-balance relationship that is required between the Board of Education and the Superintendent. Overall, Dr. Martirano is off to an excellent start. With more clear communication of expectations on behalf of both the Board of Education and the Superintendent I believe he will find even greater success in turning HCPSS into a strong institution of integrity. I look forward to the opportunity to work with him in the coming years.

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

The best way to exercise oversight of the HCPSS budget after approval is to pay attention to the budget year round, not just during budget season. I would welcome the opportunity for the Superintendent and department heads from central office to provide periodic reports regarding their spending against budgeted figures throughout the year.

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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Every effort should be made to provide a diverse experience to our students. The diversity of our student and educator populations has been one of our county's greatest strengths. To me, diversity defines Howard County. Howard County is a place where people from different backgrounds, different races, different religions, sexualities, walks of life, et al. can come together and learn from one another. The foundation for solidifying this diversity comes in our schools and in educating our students in an environment that embraces and celebrates our differences. I went to Wilde Lake High School where every day we walked under a sign that read "Where Diversity Excels." During my four years at Wilde Lake I was exposed to people who didn't look like me, who believed different things than I did, who had different home lives than mine, came from different places, lived in homes with varying economic situations, celebrated different holidays, the list goes on. The important part is that my exposure to diverse staff and students was not just something that happened alongside earning my diploma, for my classmates and me diversity was integral to earning our diplomas and influences our perspective to this day. Having a diverse population of staff and students better prepares our students for the 21st century and helps grow a more respectful environment for us all.

Equity is one of the four main tenets of our campaign and it will be a governing principle for me as a member of the Board of Education. Distilled down to its purest form, to me equity means that every student matters. As a Senior in high school I aided in a tenth grade on-grade-level English class and had my eyes opened to the vast injustice of our school system under-serving and ultimately failing many students, particularly students of color. It was eye opening for me to see the enormous achievement gap present between the AP/GT courses and the on-grade-level courses. Since that year, equity has been and will continue to be in the forefront of my mind. Ensuring equitable opportunity for all students will require HCPSS to engage communities that have been historically underserved by the education system, come to terms with those failures, and provide a concrete and earnest effort to close the achievement gap. We must work to ensure that we provide opportunities to our students that give them the ability to succeed in light of their circumstances regardless of where they live, any disability they may have, their home situation, the color of their skin, or any factor. This includes turning our focus to our most vulnerable youth, particularly at a young age, to ensure they are keeping up with their peers. This will require better collection, analysis, and use of data. It will also require programmatic differences between our higher and lower achieving schools; the Board of Education must be fierce advocates for defending equity. Equity is also closely related to recognizing that not all students are on a college-bound path. HCPSS must work to provide opportunities to take ownership of our often-touted mantra that an HCPSS diploma makes graduates college and career ready. An expansion of vocational opportunities in the County is critical to ensuring an equitable system. Expanding equity in education is a process that will continue to develop over many years and will also

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require large amounts of community input. I look forward to setting this as a priority if elected to the Board of Education.

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?

The school system has raised very valid concerns regarding its use of taxpayer money. Some of these concerns have yet to be fully and transparently addressed. The budgeting problems at the school system did not appear overnight and the solutions to these issues will not come overnight. Thus, I believe that the County Executive should do everything in his power to fund the HCPSS budget so that the Board of Education can continue to focus on the big-picture funding crisis without having to make quick and harmful cuts to the budget. As a member of the Board of Education I will work diligently to identify opportunities for savings and increased transparency within the budget in order to allay continued concerns about the efficiency of the dollars spent by HCPSS. I conveyed this opinion to the County Executive at his 2<sup>nd</sup> public hearing on the FY19 budget.

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

As high school #13's location has been decided to be Mission Road the Board of Education and County and State partners need to focus on presenting a unified effort to obtain funding for the new high school. I do not believe incoming Board members should focus on the merits of Troy Hill v. Mission Road as their new focus must be building a new high school at Mission Road. Planning schools and school locations should occur many years in advance not only to allow for proper community input but also for an appropriate decision to be made without intense pressures of timing. I would have liked the timeline for the selection of HS13's location to have more breathing room and I believe to mitigate this issue in the future the Board of Education needs to begin the discussion surrounding HS14. It will not be long before Howard County will be in need of a 14th high school; HS14's site should be located where overcrowding difficulties are currently present and should be selected in close accordance with Policy 6000: Site Selection and Acquisition.

10. How would you remediate overcrowding in schools?

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The school system's overcrowding will continue to plague our community without decisive, coordinated action between the County Government and the Board of Education. With the location of high school #13 now selected the Board of Education must begin developing a redistricting plan that addresses the immediate overcrowding in the northeast portion of the county by utilizing our currently available capacity while working toward new districts that utilize the new high school. Every effort should be made to prioritize use of brick-and-mortar capacity over our continued use of relocatable classrooms that raise security and health concerns. Proceeding into the future the Board of Education needs to partner with the County Government to take an overall more proactive approach toward planning locations for our schools.

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?

I believe that school start times should be later in the day. Due to transportation logistics we cannot have all schools start at the same time. From the research and information I have reviewed it seems as though the best order for schools to start would be Elementary, then Middle, then High Schools. I believe a shift in operations as large as school start time changes should include heavy community involvement and input in order to address legitimate concerns regarding childcare changes, high school sports schedule changes, and other logistical impacts of a change in school start times. Unfortunately with the current financial climate at the County level matched with the difficulties in the current HCPSS budget funding is hard to come by. As a Board member I would look to other school systems that have implemented school start time changes to see how they handled associated costs. I would also like to explore the potential cost benefit in bringing transportation services in-house to provide a fleet of busses more responsive to changing needs involved in changing school start times. In reality school start times is a student health issue and needs to be treated as a corresponding funding priority.

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?

Yes. Maryland is the only of the 50 states that does not provide their local Boards of Education to ability terminate their Superintendents; a change is long overdue. Here in Howard County this simple change in the law could have saved the taxpayers over \$1.5 million. Due process can be written into the contract much as it is currently for contract violations and disputes over termination would and should be heard by the Howard County Circuit Court.

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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?

After careful thought and deliberation I believe that Board of Education members should be elected countywide for seven at-large seats. The goal of the county's residents is to get the seven most qualified individuals on the Board. In light of a recent blog post I read regarding the current distribution of candidates and incumbents on the Board of Education by councilmanic district I came to realize that a districted election may compromise the ability to elect the best candidates because they happen to live in the same area. I do not refute that there are strong benefits to a districted system. Countywide campaigns are cost and energy prohibitive, elections by district would provide constituents a better ability to gain familiarity with 'their' Board member. I do not believe these benefits outweigh the negatives described previously. I do believe that there are well warranted concerns regarding accountability to the community in the countywide system but I believe that better communication regarding school cluster assignments could help address the feeling that communities do not have any one member of the Board of Education that is dedicated to be responsive to their concerns. I would like to clarify further that if districted board members are the path the community chooses then the current law must change to make districted board members *elected* by district rather than elected countywide. A major complaint regarding the countywide system is the need to run a countywide race, a major complaint regarding districted elections is an inability to gather an appropriate amount of qualified candidates; the law as it is currently written does not address either of these concerns. Thus, while my preference would be for seven seats elected at-large I believe that if Board members are districted so too should be their election.

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?

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I think that schools should be closed to development at 110% and the maximum number of years for halting development should be increased to 5 years. It should be the goal of the Board of Education to keep school attendance as close to 100% as possible. When schools exceed 100% that should trigger an internal process for the Board of Education to consider options to reduce that number. If a school reaches 110% while the Board of Education is maintaining its duty to keep schools near 100% then it is likely that an area is developing faster than the Board of Education can appropriately react and thus development should be slowed in order to ensure our students are not negatively affected by overdevelopment and subsequent overcrowding. I believe five years is a healthy upper limit for halting development so that the Board of Education can have time to adequately address issues of overcrowding with minimal impact to *current* students.

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

Burden of proof should be on the School System/State. I believe that the new Executive Director for Special Education should come from a state where the burden of proof is on the state so that they may help facilitate a cultural shift in the way our county views Special Education. As I stated in a 2016 public hearing testimony, I do not view money not being spent on accommodating students by winning litigation as cost savings as much as I see it as a Civil Rights violation. Despite the State Legislature's inaction on burden of proof, HCPSS must be willing to engage parents every step of the way to ensure that all of our children are adequately accommodated.

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

I believe cell phone use should be restricted during the school day. Cell phone addiction is real; it is not uncommon for cell phones to be used to perpetuate violence or harassment in school. I understand the need for cell phones in our 21st century world and think that educator and student input is critical in determining policies regarding cell phone use in school.

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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One position I have taken publicly is the need for increased financial literacy and life skills education for all students. I believe that HCPSS needs to prioritize finding a way to teach our students these concepts in a manner that stays with them. I advocated for this cause twice during Board of Education testimonies. I also went to Wilde Lake High School to teach a seminar on financial literacy to a math class. I have taken many positions in testimonies to the Board of Education and County Council as well as in public remarks and social media postings. In a testimony regarding the FY2017 budget I stated that budget cuts should start in programmatic and administrative line items not at the confluence of dollars and classrooms. I stand by this opinion and believe it is extremely relevant considering the budget woes currently plaguing the system.

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.

As an Eagle Scout I believe in the importance of helping my community. That is why I am running but it is also why running for Board of Education is just one of the ways I have helped my community over the years. I am a committee member for Boy Scouts of America Troop 361, the same Troop in which I achieved the rank of Eagle Scout in 2011. I participate in service projects to the community in that capacity. I serve on the Howard County Steering Committee for Best Buddies, a group I was part of in high school, where we seek to raise funds and grow the Best Buddies program in Howard County. I have testified before the Howard County Board of Education many times regarding topics including the opioid epidemic, accountability, spending priorities, transparency, mental health awareness, appropriate use of HCPSS communication channels by the Board of Education, honoring teachers' negotiated agreements, workday implementation, and the state audit of HCPSS. Many of my testimonies can be found on YouTube if you wish to review them and gain a greater understanding for my stance on these topics.

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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Not cut:

- 1) Student support staff such as counselors and psychologists. With the increased pressures of our education system our investments in our student (and staff) mental health resources needs to be stronger than ever.
- 2) Paraeducators. These individuals are critical in assisting our educators in the classroom and developing relationships with our young people. Paraeducators provide unmatched value for the dollar. I would like to invest in greater professional development opportunities for our paraeducators and not cut their presence in our schools.
- 3) Fixed Charges (health and dental costs). The school system got in the nasty habit of not investing the obligated amount into fixed charges which has led to the large deficit in the health and dental fund. Our obligations to our employees' health must remain no matter the budgetary situation.

Cut:

- 1) Outside contracts such as MAP testing and Gallup Strengthsfinder. These can be good tools but are relative luxuries. The Board of Education needs to prioritize keeping dollars inside the school system rather than contracting it out for evaluation services.
- 2) Non-mandated program initiatives. During times of budget constraint it is necessary to focus on core competencies and obligations of the school system. Programs that are not mandated and therefore siphon funding from services we must provide should be examined for their benefit to individual children as well as to the system as a whole.
- 3) Central Office Staff. I don't want to give the impression that I do not believe that central office provides a value to the school system. There are many dedicated and hard working central office staff and their work is critical to the services we provide as a school system. Having stated that, I also believe that as an effect of previous administrations the central office has become bloated and top-heavy. In times of budgetary difficulty we need to ensure that the taxpayer is getting value from each position in the school system.

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

For starters, better communication with students and the community on how to report bullying. Students need to be our eyes and ears especially with the amount of bullying that is occurring online. Many students are unaware of the resources available to them regarding anonymous reporting of bullying. We need to make sure that students are made familiar with services such as these. Further, we must inspire our young people to be upstanders rather than bystanders. Implementing restorative justice practices and encouraging relationship development between students and between students and staff will help a stronger community to prevent and detect bullying. These same restorative practices along with strong investments in counselor and psychologist positions will help our response to bullying. All reports of bullying must be taken seriously, investigated, and acted upon.

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