

## Howard County Board of Education Candidate Forum

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Hosted by CAPA-HC

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### **Introductions:**

District 1

Andre Gao

- 24 years in a center
- 3 children, youngest graduate this year
- Want to serve the people.
- Know many people that have concerns about the school system.
  - Recently there are problems→want to help solve, make the system better.
- Priorities:
  - Solve the budget issue (Proper funding)
  - Students stay healthy/safe.
  - Better education→students learn things that help them in the future, better teachers.

Pravin Ponnuri

- Worked with HOCO and CAPA before
- Both kids have graduated 10 years ago
- Been with the school system for a long time
- “We are going in the wrong direction”
  - We have less resources today than before
  - No more GT
  - School buildings were better 20 years ago
  - Budget problem→ we need to spend it wisely

- Schools should be about education, education, education
- Make sure we are not talking about other stuff

Meg Ricks

- Involved for a decade and a half
- Two children: 10th grade, 6th grade
- Struggled a lot as a child financially
  - Teachers helped her connect to opportunities→ inspired to advocate for children in howard county
- PTA president for 4 years
- Testified before the board often

## **District 2**

Not present

## **District 3**

Jolene Mosley

- Already on the board, ran in 2020
- Running unopposed
- Here for another 4-6 years
- Believe in every student and teacher
- We have to give the right resources to students so they can achieve the best they can
- We should keep moving forward in the right direction
- Takes a lot of time to make things happen, but need more momentum to go forward
- Believe that we can make things really great for students, we can work together

## **District 4**

Hiruy Hadgu

- Has collaborated CAPA in the past
- Advocate for a truly inclusive school system
- Vision: all children are able to deliver at their highest potential, every school is able to help children
- Dad is a retired professor→ education allowed him to have a better life
  - Hadgu values education

Julie Kaplan

- Moved here nearly 30 years ago because of the diverse community and the school system
- Wanted to be part of a community that valued education of every child
- 2 boys in the system have graduated
- Sad that students feel unsafe in schools, parents feel like students are unsupported
- Want to see all students, ethnicity, gender, etc, successful in school
- Executive leader for many years

## **District 5**

Catherine Carter

- Former english teacher
- Child in middle school, high, elementary, graduated
- Disappointed by the education system recently
- Moved to howard county for the school system
- Education advocator passed new bills
- Worked with the ARMS service to help soldiers check eyes
- Made significant changes in the state and nation
- Want to help make school system better, want to see the transportation cost to go down, want to make sure the budget is fulfilled

Andrea Chamblee (Liz Hammond is here on behalf)

- Graduated from Glenelg high school

- Redistricted 5 times before high school
- Graduated from UMD, in the Food and Drug administration for a long time
- Dedicated to public health/safety
- Gun safety advocator
- Safety: want better school buildings

Trent Kittleman

- Passionate about education
- 8 years in legislature
  - Know about problems in the system
- Grandkids in the system
- Lengthy background in legislation and law
- Helped fix paratransit, helped fix the bay bridge
- Involved in the system for many years
- 12/13 years as a judge for schools
- Delegate- talk with residents of howard county
- Make sure that Howard County stops falling

## Discussions

Candidate 1: Meg Ricks

Electronics are taking over the school system. 20 years ago, homework was done on paper.

Now, children are refusing to even stay 1 hour away from electronics.

There should be more opportunities for children to take part in sports.

The problem is that buildings are aging and they're not being remodeled.

Capacity is taken into consideration when redistricting happens.

Parents seem to care more about the presidential level, when they should be worrying about the county level.

Candidate 2: Andre Gao

The parents should have a role in enforcing times to use smartphones

Parents should teach their children when phones are a good thing.

There should be a few days dedicated to the beginning of the school year to train children on electronics and safety.

The school budget is cutting classes down so there are more students in each class.  
The school system is receiving an even smaller budget per year.  
Parents are completely unaware of the budget changings that have been happening.  
Even though the tax rate in Howard county is high, much of the tax isn't coming back to the teachers.  
People would rather try to find a job that pays higher than to be a teacher.  
Teaching people to love each other is a very important quality of schools.

Candidate 3: Pravin Ponnuri

The biggest health hazard to children are smartphones  
High school capacity has been implemented to restrict the number of students that could go to the school.  
The definition of school capacity keeps changing over the years.  
The cost of building homes is causing less money to be spent on school systems.  
Redistricting should be done with a larger gray area. Students who are already in a school system should have the option to choose which school they want to go to.

**1. Andre Gao**

- What do you think about Phones in school and what should we do?
- Not a good idea, we need to educate students, teachers, and parents, to enforce rules about what is the best thing about phones. Need to balance out. Schools have the right to take them away, parents can pick them up.
- When a new school year starts, dedicate a small amount of time to teach students how to restrict phone usage paired with the safety and diversity lessons.

*Regarding more school activities*

- Budget cuts have lower coaches
- 3 bands are outstanding and are being cut to 2
- Budget issues are #1
- Budget cuts aren't good

What's your opinion on renovations and portables?

- Need money for these renovations to go into planning
- 58%-52% of the money from the county goes to the school system
- Centennial is crowded, video of someone not being able to move
- Put students first

What are your thoughts on redistricting because as a county we are under capacity?

- Capacity will force new schools to be built
- Transparent criteria for redistricting
- Don't want to split kids who go to the same elementary and middle school
- Redistricting will be near the school

- Transportation costs are increasing, so students who are too far away are bad
- Too much transportation is bad for the environment as well
- Consider communities input
- Want to mix students with different income
- We have good intentions, but we need to see results
- Redistricting is thought hard not easy

Why are parents unaware of the new budget cuts?

- Talked to residents and they weren't aware, even some PTA members

What do you plan to do to make teaching something people want to do?

- Teachers should be paid the highest in the nation
- We have the highest income and teachers should be paid accordingly
- Tax should come to education
- Advocate that money should come to where it should be

What do you think about students facing discrimination and other hardships?

Teaching people how to love each other

Treat each other with respect

How to resolve conflict with peace

Teach them young

Work in harmony

## 2. Meg Ricks

What do you think about Phones in school and what should we do?

- It's a problem, it's irresistible, I would love to see a balance, or have pouches to keep away but not too far away
- They are for emergencies
- . Having phones out too much is bad.

*Regarding more school activities*

- Having more opportunities would be fantastic
- Teams are really hard to get in

What's your opinion on renovations and portables?

- Missing money from state because county isn't putting money into schools
- If we don't do something, funds stop
- We don't have what we need
- Schools are getting neglected
- Kids aren't choosing a building that makes them crowded, they live where they live, so we need to address those things
- People don't think about overcrowdedness when moving to a school
- Can't choose if more houses are built

What are your thoughts on redistricting because as a county we are under capacity?

- My daughter was going to Howard High, but the school system didn't do anything to help the overcrowding
- Wants to balance redistricting
- Wants walkers to be safe because they don't have enough money to get more buses
- Wants a good feeder system
- 1/5 of the county has no high school is very scary
- Don't want to send people too far from home
- The county needs to buy land to build a new school

Why are parents unaware of the new budget cuts and where could the news come from?

- The document of cut was too long
- The PTA council has been helping local PTA
- Need to share with parents
- A lot of students are impacted by GT programs at the elementary level

What do you plan to do to make teaching something people want to do?

- Is a teacher
- Very flexible
- Got bitten and slapped
- Need enough people in school to run safely
- Teachers need more training
- We need to make teachers feel respected, and that administrators have their back
- Respect issue

What do you think about students facing discrimination and other hardships?

- Want to make them feel safe
- In an environment where everyone can participate

## District 4

Hadgu (district 4)

- What does "truly inclusive" mean to you?
  - We have had situations where school children feel alienated because of who they are (race, gender). The school system should make sure they feel safe at school. One way the school system does not do this is that some schools are underperforming, many of those are attended by children of color. One question is why some schools are underperforming while others are not. I believe that this is because we have not fought to make sure these children have the resources they need. We need to fight for all children to have resources, not just some children.

- If you were elected, how would you address the funding issue that some schools have?
  - First way: Directly in the board's authority, fix the bus situation. Ensure that there is strong oversight. School budget is important because we need to allocate resources for underperforming schools.
  - Second way: Legislative committee in the school→ make sure they are zoning responsibly and making good land use decisions. Believe that there is a better way to advocate for these decisions
- Sudden changes made about buses- gives the parents a hard time.
  - County has been pushing for later school start times. Because of this they implemented a low cost option to change the bus contract in conjunction with the implementation of late school start times.
- What do you plan to do about delayed fixing/expanding schools?
  - Advocate for closing loopholes in the land use and funding laws. Different building business taxes to lessen cost of building. Should not try to collaborate with private/public businesses due to transparency issues. Need to make sure developers pay their fair share. Save more money in the school budget to use for maintenance.
  - School bonds: the county issues school bonds to raise money
    - Rebuilding/maintenance needs half billion dollars. We need to figure out a way to pay for this.
- Inclusivity:
  - Some schools with children of color are not performing well because our community has not fought for those kids as it fought for other kids. This needs to change. I think that we should make sure every school is able to deliver a good education. Need to make sure all children can deliver at their highest potential.
- Evidence that underperforming schools are underperforming due to lack of resources?
  - My kids go to Fulton elementary school (good school). When they leave school, they have resources. Both parents are at home with the ability to provide resources. There is a significant portion of our community with single parents or parents working long hours with no capacity to provide as much as a two parent household. Classes with huge amounts of students have less capacity for individual attention.
- Service for disability:



- The level of service has been going down. County tracks funding by enrollment. If the budget passes this year, the maintenance of effort next year will be with that budget. The level of service has been declining. The basic reason people come to Howard County is for schools. If we are cutting teachers, GT, and special education we are not funding schools the way they should be funded. The county has been using money to provide a new library, other unnecessary things. It is important the school board puts pressure on the county to stop passing bad land use and zoning decisions.
- What programs should money be allocated for?
  - We need to make sure that the money from the school board is used judiciously. Make sure there is no waste. While we may be able to save a few million by doing that, we need more. We need to fund the blueprint while making sure that there is strict oversight. The school board should make sure that the numbers are accurate, which has not been the case. Cutting GT does not make sense.
- What are your expectations for the new superintendent
  - To recognize the relationship between the superintendent and school board is. The willingness to be available for oversight. If the superintendent is doing that, we can rebuild the trust the schools have lost over the years. Employee morale = good education outcome.
- Reason for redistricting?
  - Logic for redistricting will improve educational outcomes. It did not: does not address the fact that the individual was not doing well. Make sure it is for the welfare of the students.

#### Kaplan (District 4)

- How would you address the funding issue?
  - The budget has gone up in the last three years. The government spends over 19,000 per student (over the national average). Our issue is that we are not using the funding wisely. We are spending too much on transportation, which is taking away from other resources. This caused the cuts in GT and teachers. I believe that it is caused by the lack of rigor.
- They cut bus service where I live. If it is fully funded, why are the buses not coming?
  - That is an issue of changing the walking radius due to trying to lessen the transportation cost.

- What do you plan to do to make the bus situation better?
  - New plan came out→ seems like it is sensible. Seems like there is a lack of rigor in the decision making process, the decision made about the buses was made quickly.
- Low level of transparency in the decision making
  - Lack of rigor. The bus company is far away because the local drivers are no longer employed. The issue is that the school board made the decision hastily and with little transparency.
- How would you balance your job and being on the board?
  - Kids are not at home anymore. Accustomed to having to drive kids and balance a job. Since kids are not home anymore, I can have more time and use skills from when the kids were at home. Our job is to make sure the schools support students by applying pressure. About building collaborative relationships- this team (the board) can be difficult because we don't get to choose and we have different ideas. We have the same goal of improving the school system (common ground).
- Minority support:
  - Howard County has been very supportive of all minorities. We have gone to undeserving the rest of the community. The ethnicity of the county has not changed that much over time: it is the leadership that has changed. The portion of lower income students have changed- more stressful on the system because they require more funds. We need to balance those funds.
- Funding:
  - The raw numbers in the funding for schools has gone up while enrollment has not changed much. The budget is pressured by salary for teachers and 301k. The Board of Education needs to optimize the budget and the right programs are advocated for. The enrollment will be flat for the next few years.
- What programs should money be allocated for?
  - We need to restore the GT programs (relatively small amount of money). They need to look at the administration costs in the central office. Administration in offices need to be held accountable for performances. More research needs to be done on which programs to cut and support.
- What are your expectations for the new superintendent

- They have to be skilled in team building, navigating complex situations in diversity. Lacking currently: lack of focus on goals and focus on goals. This has caused us to lose some things. We need to decide what we need to focus on to allow us to actually accomplish things.
- Reason for redistricting?
  - Redistricting has a lot to do with growth. We are not seeing as much growth as before so there should not be as much redistricting. I would hope to see it done reasonably if it does happen (students are close to their schools). It should be geographically based.

## District 5

### Catherine Carter ([website](#))

- **First contact 8 years ago, reason for running after 8 years.**
  - Eye clinic and 160 pairs of glasses for kids in Howard County
    - Concerned about Budget
  - Removing resources in District 5
  - Education was not the same 15 years ago when one of her children first started
  - Financial Decisions are not the smartest
    - Teachers are not paid enough
    - Teachers are going to leave due to low pay
    - Paying for buses with their engines on, wasting money
  - More money should have been put towards the budget
    - Significantly down over the last 10 years
    - County spending money on unnecessary things rather than better education
    - Has not kept up with inflation
  - Don't be afraid to testify against unfair rules, don't be afraid of political views.
  - Many of our schools are in serious need of repair
  - School start times aren't feasible
  - Transportation costs 30 mil-60 mil
  - Redistricting making kids walk longer distances (up to a mile)
  - The importance of not working in silence and as a team
  - **Working together in all tiers, state, county, community, etc.**
  - Pushing for a multi-year strategic working plan
  - There is room to grow in special ed (fantastic programs in other counties such as Montgomery)
  -

- **Multi-year projection, if I vote for you what will you do for this multi-year projection?**
  - Find a stakeholder group from all levels (experts, community members, states, etc), the end goal is to be able to not cut budgets
- **How do you see the teacher's situation right now?**
  - Howard county attraction is the strong education program
  - Classroom sizes growing rapidly, and teachers don't have the space in the room to put that many desks/students
  - Teachers don't have enough money to live comfortably in Howard county
  - Make sure teachers have support and discipline
  - Safety is a huge problem
  - Dont immediately send special education kids to the special ed class
- **School leaders**
  - Administrators attacked, some supported, some unsupported, need to find a superintendent that has a long fiscal history.
  - Superintendent has to be balanced, have to inspire but be **firm**, and need someone who can lead.
  - The trust between school leaders and the community need to be built again.
  - Needs a superintendent who doesn't just want to please everyone and rather a person who makes firm decisions.
  - Need more professional training for teachers
  - Utilize Communist Service Acts
    - Use more efficiently

### Trent Kittleman ([website](#))

- Budget Concerns
  - Legislature is continuously passing bills that are giving states more power over local
  - Unable to afford the legislature
  - One size fits all - does not work
  - If there is so much that is needed to be paid for, it does not make up for the decreasing amount of students
    - See if there is a different way to structure things to be more effective
- Has plenty of experience speaking out to authority and politics
  - Helpful for running and making change
- Problems with bus system and contracts
  - They canceled all the contracts of the local bus providers

- The county made contracts with a company registered in California
- The company started six different contracts at one time - recipe for disaster
- Was in the transportation program - bay bridge construction
  - Interaction and communication proved effective in the project
  - Collaborative effort
    - Imperative for making change.
- Watching every school board meeting since August
  - Impressed with attention to detail with the board.
  - Board did a reasonable job with dealing with the deficit.
- The school system just has the central system dominate
  - There should be parents contributing
  - They are not putting the right kids in the right groups
    - Such as autistic kids
      - They are not exposed to the right groups and are not receiving the best education for them
      - Knowing where to put the children
- What will you do to feed into this multi-year planning projection?
  - They apply transportation to the capitol budget
    - There needs to be accountability for budget
      - Planning down the road
        - Did you achieve a, b, c...
        - If not, they don't get funded
    - There is none and the priorities change
      - They're going to take care of this next year - but they don't
    - Look into the full budget and build into and improve on it
- Teachers
  - Surprised at the positive responses about the school system
  - Only ~13 or 15% confidence of the school board
    - Find ways to improve that
  - Howard county pays good wages to teachers
  - There has been studies that wages is not the driving force
    - Rather workload and the way that they are treated
    - Teachers have been forced to wear padding to protect themselves from children that are acting out
      - It is not good for the teachers or for other students
- School leaders
  - Importance of school leaders:
    - Steven Wallace

- He was put into Harpers Choice Middle School- one the worst schools.
- Under his influence, improved the school to one of the top schools.
- But none of it lasted because the principals after did not make lasting changes.
  - It is the principals that create a good environment of schools.
  - There needs to be flexibility at certain times at certain places.
- Relationship between superintendent and BOE
  - What type of superintendent are you looking for?
    - Find answer in the questionnaire on website - goes in depth in everything.
    - Like Carrie Wright

**Andrea Chamblee - represented by Lizz Hammon ([Website](#))**

- ***Budget Concerns***
  - Lazy Budgeting
    - Unable to fact-check and review the budget.
    - Takes big chunks of the budget because it is easier.
    - They do not check what or who would be impacted.
    - Board has to keep the Superintendent responsible.
    - Recommends taking more time to carefully review budget cuts.
  - Parties are able to influence the superintendent.
  - Board Members are dependent on full time workers.
    - Make and Provide Information
    - Extra resources used.
      - I.E.
        - Zoom
        - Google Meet
        - Microsoft Teams
      - Lots of small budget uses that are unnecessary.
  - 3500 Students impacted by the non-transportation zones.
  - Contract scrutiny is needed in Howard County
    - Foreign vendors rather than Local
    - Did not fact check and manage foreign vendors (Zoom Company for buses)
      - Central Office took Zoom's word for buses (new with buses), yet they could not handle it.
  - ***Teachers***
    - Teachers are scared and miserable.

- Toxic situation where Teachers are afraid of being cut or impacted.
      - No way to live.
      - No way to treat people.
    - Stability in the workforce
    - Increase Moral
    - They do not feel valued.
    - Pay and benefits are part of teachers' impact and their morale.
- ***Autism and Special Education***
  - Segregating Autism and Special Ed is not ideal.
  - 90% of Time is spent with Teachers, but many teachers do not have training.
  - The Board of Ed and Central Office have great education and ideas.
- ***Multi-Year Projection and Planning (What you will do to feed into the Multi-Year Planning)***
  - Central Office argues for Unknowns.
    - Central Office refuses to make long term projections due to “unknowns”
    - Argues that they are able to plan ahead, make estimations.
    - Needs to change that the Central Office has to try to make long term planning.
    - Planning won't be perfect, but planning is never perfect.
  - Central Office needs to change.
    - The Board of Education has very little bandwidth on the Central Office.
- ***School Leaders (Principles, Vice Principals)***
  - Staying at school as an administrator helps reap the benefits.
  - School Board Leaders Importance
    - Thinks Harpers Choice was a jail during Steven Wallace
      - Harpers Choice fell apart after Steven Wallace
      - Now it is 77/77 out of all middle schools.
- ***Superintendent and the Board of Education***
  - Need a superintendent that is not a people pleaser.
    - Who does not strive to please everyone and strong enough to cut away dead weight and things that are not beneficial.
  - Maintaining the Status Quo is not a good thing.
- ***Third Party Consultants***
  - Citizens have bright minds able to look through the budget.
  - Hiring Third Parties are expensive and are not always accurate.

## **Closing Remarks**

### **D1**

Pravin Ponnuri

- The board of education is like the board of directors of a multimillion company.
- They need to have experience with finance and need to know what they are doing.

Meg Ricks

- really loved talking about the education and the county
- Hope you will vote for me.
- Has a background about what's happening in the school and works in a preschool.

Andre Gao

- To run a big school system like Howard County is a very big job and complex.
- Requires many skills such as budgeting.
- There needs to be someone to have these people managing skills.
- 30 years of financial and 20 years of people managing skills

### **D3**

Jolene Mosley

- Looking forward to continuing her time on the board
- Believe in every student and in every teacher and we can do this together.

### **D4**

Hiruy Hadgu

- Long before he had kids, he was advocating for schools because he knew how much a difference they make in a child's life, in a community's life.
- Stakeholder - the quality of life of his kids lies in the school system.

Julie Kaplan

- Here to serve you, the parents
- In this time of great polarization, hopes we can unite for the children.

### **D5**

Catherine Carter

- Long history of fixing things
  - Passed many bills; when she saw issues, she needed to fix them.
- Came to Howard County for the schools.



- The most important thing is the kids and their education to prepare them for the workforce.

#### Trent Kittleman

- Learn a great deal from the people we talk to and favorite part of the campaign.
- If you want to know anything about me, go to [trentkittleman.com](http://trentkittleman.com) (not political)
  - Has all the information you need.

#### Andrea Chamblee

- Teaches class on Thursday night at George Washington University that she takes very seriously.
- She has a meet and greet at the Glenwood library.