

2024 HC BoE Candidate Questionnaire

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The Howard County Board of Education (BoE) consists of seven members who serve four-year terms. Two are elected countywide as at-large members, while the remaining five represent each of the five electoral districts. On November 5th, 2024, these five district seats will be contested in a general election. To find which District you are eligible to vote for, please visit the [HC Interactive Map](#) and input your address in the search bar. Then, select “political boundaries” and click “council districts.”

Currently, six candidates have active campaigns for the school board. To better understand their priorities for HCPSS, we surveyed each. Five provided responses, which have been edited into concise summaries below. For those interested in learning more about the context and background, we recommend they check out the unedited version of the responses [here](#).

We also published a factual survey about the candidates, which is available [here](#).

DISTRICT 1

Priority → Budgeting	Candidate Andre Gao	Candidate Meg Ricks
<p>What potential sources of funding should the school board explore? How will you use your position to advocate for such funding?</p>	<p>The main sources of funding should be from the county and the state...This percentage should not decrease. Currently, it is at 54%, about 4% lower than the historical average of 58%. We need to bring it back to 58% level.</p> <p>We also need to advocate for the state to provide funding if we are asked to add or expand state-directed programs. Additionally, we must ensure that the state funding we receive is fair compared to what other counties get from the state.</p>	<p>I think that we need to look at the share of the county budget going to HCPSS to increase the percentage back to levels we saw in the past.</p> <p>HCPSS should also be actively pursuing grant opportunities to help fund one time expenses so that we can better plan for recurring expenses in yearly budgeted funds. If we do look to a private public partnership to fund some of our needed capital projects, I would want to see a revenue generating aspect to that project to help pay.</p>
<p>How will you ensure that early-year GT programs, music and art programs, etc. are protected from budget cuts?</p>	<p>I will ensure that the signature programs of our school are preserved by voting against any cuts. Any new programs added should come with new funding so that the existing programs can be maintained.</p>	<p>We will need to have year after year of truly ‘historic’ funding to keep the school system we expect in Howard County. In years where cuts cannot be avoided, I would favor scaling back programs rather than eliminating them.</p>

Priority → Transportation	Candidate Andre Gao	Candidate Meg Ricks
Should any accountability measures be considered when hiring transportation contractors ? What is the ideal timeframe for the Board to review and approve these companies?	Yes...Before the existing contract expires or terminates due to poor performance of the contractor, the Board should start to review and approve new contractors.	Definitely! Staff should present all the needed material about the contract, including all contract language to Board members in advance. The public should be able to hear about it at a board meeting before a vote must be taken...The initial presentation and vote should not happen in the same meeting.
Would you support HCPSS owning its buses ?	Yes, I would support HCPSS owning its buses, since this would provide flexibility and reliability. This can be started with a small percentage of transportation and be evaluated before adding more buses to the fleet.	The most important thing is for HCPSS students to be able to safely and reliably get to school and back every day. I would support HCPSS owning buses if we had the funding needed to do it and if we could do that better than the current model.
Regarding school redistricting, do you prioritize equity or the reduction of commuting distance for students?	I believe equity can be better achieved without sending students to schools far from their homes. Students should attend schools that are close to their homes and in or near their communities.	When redistricting, capacity utilization is the first and foremost factor. We do not want students to have to be far from their school and have long bus rides...We also don't want to concentrate poverty as previous boards did when they redistricted Ducketts Lane Elementary in a way that made it a new Title I school. The school system, however, cannot be expected to fix zoning decisions made by the county.
Priority → Staff Recruitment	Candidate Andre Gao	Candidate Meg Ricks
How will you, as an elected official, engage in teacher compensation negotiations? What type of compensation can recruit and retain qualified educators?	The key to compensation negotiation is to understand and compare our county's compensation to that of neighboring counties...The compensation that enables us to recruit and retain qualified educators should be competitive.	Howard County has to meet and exceed the blueprint salary levels to remain competitive...We also must address working conditions, including things like class sizes and student cell phone policy, as well as compensation.

<p>What strategies would you implement to improve diversity among teaching staff and management?</p> <p>How would you address the current underrepresentation of Asian Americans in staff and in HCPSS management?</p>	<p>Once [staff] are recruited, we should provide strong support to them. For underrepresented groups such as Asian Americans, we should increase marketing and promotion of HCPSS to potential teachers in these groups. For the management positions of HCPSS...we should provide training and career development support to existing staffs to help them move into management positions.</p>	<p>We need to nurture and sustain a culture of inclusivity...I also think that fostering opportunities for mentoring, networking, and support are crucial. Developing pathways for individuals in other careers to become teachers could be beneficial for increasing the number of Asian American educators as well as those in other underrepresented groups.</p>
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Priority → Transparency	Candidate Andre Gao	Candidate Meg Ricks
<p>What steps will you take to increase communication between the Board, parents, and students?</p>	<p>Beside regular meetings with parents and students, the Board should open more channels to communicate with parents and students.</p>	<p>Information from HCPSS as well as information from individual schools needs to be provided in multiple languages. Partnering with stakeholder groups like CAPA, PTACHC, CAC, SECAC, local school groups, and more should also help to amplify important messages.</p> <p>Making sure that websites are up to date and easy to navigate is also really important. Information from HCPSS as well as information from individual schools needs to be provided in multiple languages.</p>

DISTRICT 4

Priority → Budgeting	Candidate Julie Kaplan	Candidate Jen Mallo, incumbent
<p>What potential sources of funding should the school board explore? How will you use your position to advocate for such funding?</p>	<p>Before seeking additional funds, I'd advocate for a comprehensive audit and assessment of current expenditures to ensure existing funds are being utilized to maximize the impact of every dollar...The Board should then explore</p>	<p>Our state's increasingly tight budget means that the Board of Education must be especially vigilant to make sure that funding is sufficient.</p> <p>As the Chair of the Board...I have strong</p>

	<p>diverse funding sources including federal and state grants, public-private partnerships, and community fundraising initiatives.</p> <p>As a Board member, I will advocate for funding by actively engaging with local and state legislators, presenting data-driven arguments on the necessity of funds, and collaborating with community stakeholders to build a united front.</p>	<p>working relationships with our state legislators, County Executive, and County Council members, and I support legislation to explore various new revenue streams. We cannot just accept flat funding and put valued programs in jeopardy. We need new funding to recruit and retain high quality staff, to renovate our aging schools, and to continue the programs that draw families to live in Howard County.</p>
<p>How will you ensure that early-year GT programs, music and art programs, etc. are protected from budget cuts?</p>	<p>Advocating for a budget that prioritizes a well-rounded education is essential, recognizing the critical role these programs play in fostering student development and creativity. Transparent budget reviews and strategic resource allocation will be key in safeguarding these essential programs from financial reductions.</p>	<p>Every student in HCPSS deserves academic support that meets their individual needs as well as meaningful extracurricular opportunities. Through petitions, emails, and conversations, I've heard directly from students about the value of G/T classes, music programs such as orchestra and band, and clubs like speech and debate. I strongly support funding for these areas.</p> <p>During budget deliberations this past January, as Board Chair, I added public hearings until everyone who wished to voice their opinion on the budget priorities was able to do so. In future budget discussions, I will continue to promote transparency and elevate student voices.</p>
<p>Priority → Transportation</p>	<p>Candidate Julie Kaplan</p>	<p>Candidate Jen Mallo</p>
<p>Should any accountability measures be considered when hiring transportation contractors?</p> <p>What is the ideal timeframe for</p>	<p>Yes, accountability measures should be considered when hiring transportation contractors to ensure safety, reliability, and quality of service. The Board should be given 60-90 days to review a new proposal to allow for a thorough evaluation and ensure that any</p>	<p>Yes. I believe that the school system's contracts with transportation companies should include clear financial penalties if they fail to deliver on their commitments...contractors should be subject to regular evaluations to create a culture of continuous improvement and should routinely</p>

<p>the Board to review and approve these companies?</p>	<p>concerns can be addressed before finalizing the contracts.</p>	<p>meet with the Office of Student Transportation. Every contract that comes before the Board of Education should be initially reviewed well in advance of the board's vote.</p>
<p>Would you support HCPSS owning its buses?</p>	<p>While I don't feel strongly about HCPSS owning its buses, I do feel strongly about having an objective way to assess a solution that provides Howard County with a cost-effective and safe method to transport students. This solution should be scalable and address the varied transportation issues across the county, ensuring efficiency and reliability for all students.</p>	<p>Yes. Shifting from relying on external contractors to owning and operating our own partial fleet would solve some of the transportation issues we have seen in the past...The investment in a partial fleet may allow us to scale up to having more buses for field trips, after school activities, sports and more. Additionally, we could invest in environmentally friendly options like electric buses to reduce our climate footprint.</p>
<p>Regarding school redistricting, do you prioritize equity or the reduction of commuting distance for students?</p>	<p>When redistricting is required, I'd advocate to: minimize disruption to students and their families, minimize commuting times, and keep community support systems intact. There is no evidence that gerrymandered districts improve student outcomes or equity.</p>	<p>School capacity should be the first consideration in any redistricting moves instead of commuting distances or equity. Both factors, as well as keeping neighborhoods together, should both be considered and balanced for any school redistricting. It is a complex process that requires hearing from the community, scrutinizing the impacts of several interdependent decisions, and engaging in substantive deliberation to balance those factors with each other.</p>

<p>Priority → Staff Recruitment</p>	<p>Candidate Julie Kaplan</p>	<p>Candidate Jen Mallo</p>
<p>How will you, as an elected official, engage in teacher compensation negotiations?</p>	<p>I will engage in teacher compensation negotiations by collaborating with educators, union representatives, and stakeholders to</p>	<p>Increasing salaries and implementing supplemental programs like loan forgiveness, housing assistance, and career development</p>

<p>What type of compensation can recruit and retain qualified educators?</p>	<p>ensure competitive salaries, performance-based incentives, professional development opportunities, and comprehensive benefits packages. I advocate for targeted professional development...and creating channels for open, ongoing feedback from teachers.</p>	<p>ladders can enhance our appeal as an employer. Establishing relationships with strong teacher preparation programs...can create a pipeline of qualified candidates eager to join the school system upon graduation.</p> <p>Retention of staff can be supported by...creating robust support systems such as mentorship programs and ongoing professional development opportunities.</p>
<p>What strategies would you implement to improve diversity among teaching staff and management?</p> <p>How would you address the current underrepresentation of Asian Americans in staff and in HCPSS management?</p>	<p>At a minimum, we need to create a supportive and inclusive work environment that values teacher autonomy and input, allowing educators to have a voice in decision-making processes. Beyond that, we need to work with underrepresented communities, leveraging existing organizations like CAPA to help us develop a differentiated experience for educators from underrepresented groups.</p>	<p>I believe HCPSS should strengthen its partnership with the Asian American Educators of Howard County, which is doing important work in this area. I also suggest that we hold a joint meeting between the Board of Education and the county's Asian American and Pacific Islander Commission so that HCPSS can benefit from their recommendations.</p>
<p>Priority → Transparency</p>	<p>Candidate Julie Kaplan</p>	<p>Candidate Jen Mallo</p>
<p>What steps will you take to increase communication between the Board, parents, and students?</p>	<p>I will advocate for several key improvements. First, I will push for more consistent and proactive use of existing communication channels to ensure timely updates and reduce surprises. Second, I will support measures to enhance transparency, such as making meeting minutes and decision-making processes more accessible and understandable to the public.</p>	<p>To improve communication, we should build on our existing tools—such as our website, newsletter, and school-specific updates—by creating opportunities for more direct and authentic interactions. Nobody should feel like every communication from their school or school system is carefully scripted...We must create accessible spaces for community members to engage with Board members and discuss important issues.</p>

DISTRICT 5

Priority → Budgeting	Candidate Andrea Chamblee This candidate did not respond to the CAPA questionnaire.	Candidate Trent Kittleman
What potential sources of funding should the school board explore? How will you use your position to advocate for such funding?		First, HCPSS must seriously pursue using a Public Private Partnership (P-3) to address our capital needs. Second, I think the Board should explore transferring some or all of its health-related positions to the County. HCPSS employs...over 650 [health] employees. And third, do a complete re-examination of the budget to see if there is a better way to deliver and pay for the services the school provides.
How will you ensure that early-year GT programs, music and art programs, etc. are protected from budget cuts ?		Focus spending on teaching and basic education: math, reading, science, art and music. A good way to make these decisions on occasion is by comparing the relevant benefits of the expenditures under consideration. Part of this process may be to rethink or reprioritize the expansive set of goals. In the last board meeting, there were 18 agenda items for which a Goal was attached. Twelve of the 18 were listed under Educational Equity Framework. This may not be the best way of framing some of the items and expenditures.
Priority → Transportation	Candidate Andrea Chamblee	Candidate Trent Kittleman
Should any accountability measures be considered when		Unless there is a good and valid reason for not doing so, every contract HCPSS enters into

<p>hiring transportation contractors?</p> <p>What is the ideal timeframe for the Board to review and approve these companies?</p>		<p>should have a reasonable liquidated damages clause. For any contract over \$5 million, the Board should have the actual written contract in hand for at least two Board meetings.</p> <p>Considering the history of bus contracts, a longer time frame might be necessary and should definitely begin in the year before the contract would go into effect.</p>
<p>Would you support HCPSS owning its buses?</p>		<p>It would depend on the likelihood that owning our own buses would be a cost savings. I would need to know such things as where would we house the buses, how large a staff of mechanics would we need to keep them safe and running, what is the average lifespan of a bus, what kind of buses would we want and what happens if a better, cleaner bus becomes available, and what protection would we have to ensure that hired drivers would be available?</p>
<p>Regarding school redistricting, do you prioritize equity or the reduction of commuting distance for students?</p>		<p>The two most important considerations in designing new districts are (1) move the fewest students possible, and (2) preserve community integrity. Reducing commuting distances is also important, both for the students and for the budget. Equity should be a factor only to prevent an inequity, such as any group being unnecessarily scheduled for longer rides than average or later return home trips.</p>
<p>Priority → Staff Recruitment</p>	<p>Candidate Andrea Chamblee</p>	<p>Candidate Trent Kittleman</p>
<p>How will you, as an elected official, engage in teacher</p>		<p>As a former labor attorney, I would hope to represent the Board in negotiations with the</p>

<p>compensation negotiations?</p> <p>What type of compensation can recruit and retain qualified educators?</p>		<p>union.</p> <p>Recruitment and retention of teachers in today's market is often less of a salary issue and more of job satisfaction. The first step is to reinstitute meaningful exit interviews with teachers, paraeducators, and other classroom assistants to get an actual understanding of why they are leaving and what would have made them stay.</p>
<p>What strategies would you implement to improve diversity among teaching staff and management?</p> <p>How would you address the current underrepresentation of Asian Americans in staff and in HCPSS management?</p>		<p>I would hire the people best able to teach. Criteria would include both teaching skills and subject mastery. Alternatives to the standard teacher certification should be considered. Broadening these criteria will encourage and allow more minority participation – especially for Asian Americans. Hiring based on race is unconstitutional and produces several negative results: it diminishes the likelihood of acquiring the best teachers, and it creates a stigma that minority teachers are “diversity hires,” whether true or not.</p>
<p>Priority → Transparency</p>	<p>Candidate Andrea Chamblee</p>	<p>Candidate Trent Kittleman</p>
<p>What steps will you take to increase communication between the Board, parents, and students?</p>		<p>The first thing would be to revamp the Board meetings...It might be useful to form a focus group of parents, including both satisfied and dissatisfied, to learn what communications they believe the system does [well] and what are major deterrents that prevent them from feeling involved.</p> <p>Finally, although HCPSS posts an incredible amount of information on its website, the site</p>

		suffers from information overload...It needs to be revised to add a site map and to retool the search engine to perform far better than it does.
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