

2024 HC BoE Candidate Questionnaire

Tiffany Tang, River Hill High School
Mentor: Dr. Feng Ouyang

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. We need to ensure that the county provides an appropriate percentage of its revenue to the schools. 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. I also want to look for opportunities for additional dedicated revenue to supplement and not supplant funding for our school system. 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 for it. An example might be a theater space that could be rented out.</p> <p>I am a believer in the need for and benefit of collaboration between the school system leadership, funding partners, educators, and the community. I like to identify 'win-win opportunities' or ways that we join forces to achieve our mutual goals and help one another find success. My experience serving on the Board's Operating Budget Review Committee and serving as a co-chair this past year has allowed me to bring different people together and find common priorities in the school system budget. I have been advocating for funding for</p>

		our schools for many years through my work with local and county PTAs and other community groups, testifying before the county executive and county council. I intend to continue advocating locally as well as advocating for state funding.
How will you ensure that early-year GT programs, music and art programs, etc. are protected from budget cuts ?	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.	Education is an investment and the budget has to grow as costs increase. Some of this is related to new requirements of the Blueprint, like the expansion of pre kindergarten, but a lot of it is what is required to keep excellent educators and to provide what is needed to educate every child in a time when the cost of pretty much everything has gone up. We don't want to lose our arts and GT programs in the early grades that enrich the learning experience and help keep kids engaged and excited about school, so 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.

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, the accountability measures should be considered when hiring transportation contractors. 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. There must be adequate time for questions and answers and for the community to weigh in. The initial presentation and vote

		<p>should not happen in the same meeting. When that happens it gives the appearance, if not also the reality, of the Board's vote just being a "rubber stamp." The process needs to be transparent and there needs to be honest evaluation at every step and opportunities for feedback to lead to correction of problems in a timely manner.</p>
<p>Would you support HCPSS owning its buses?</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>The consulting firm that HCPSS hired when the school start time changes were first being implemented suggested that owning its own buses should be a goal for the school system to work towards. I think the main obstacle is the upfront cost. The consultants suggested that it would save money in the long run. I think that it could also help with some other challenges to have bus drivers employed by the school system directly. 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.</p>
<p>Regarding school redistricting, do you prioritize equity or the reduction of commuting distance for students?</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>When redistricting, capacity utilization is the first and foremost factor. Overcrowding negatively impacts students and hurts vulnerable students the most. Other factors help to identify options to address capacity without creating additional problems. We do not want students to have to be far from their school and have long bus rides. This creates a barrier to participation in afterschool activities and events. We also don't want to concentrate poverty as previous boards did when they redistricted Ducketts Lane</p>

		<p>Elementary in a way that made it a new title I school or when the board created an attendance area that made the new high school the high school with the highest rate of students receiving Free and Reduced Priced Meals in the county. The school system, however, cannot be expected to fix zoning decisions made by the county. I look forward to working with the county government to keep the needs of our school system in mind as they plan how our county grows in the future. I believe they can make better decisions that lead to having schools and other necessary infrastructure where they are needed in all parts of the county.</p>
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Priority → Staff Recruitment	Candidate Andre Gao	Candidate Meg Ricks
<p>How will you, as an elected official, engage in teacher compensation negotiations?</p> <p>What type of compensation can recruit and retain qualified educators?</p>	<p>The key to compensation negotiation is to understand and compare our county's compensation to that of neighboring counties.</p> <p>This requires careful research and analysis. The compensation that enables us to recruit and retain qualified educators should be competitive.</p>	<p>Howard County has to meet and exceed the blueprint salary levels to remain competitive. I will advocate for funding to achieve this. I will keep collaboration and respect as my guiding values in negotiations. We also must address working conditions, including things like class sizes and student cell phone policy, as well as compensation to keep our educators here in Howard County and to get others to come here as well.</p>
<p>What strategies would you implement to improve diversity among teaching staff and management?</p> <p>How would you address the current underrepresentation</p>	<p>We should have more ways to recruit diversified teaching staff. Once they 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.</p>	<p>While we cannot change a national perception overnight that undervalues those who educate our children from pre-K through high school, we can work on that perception here in Howard County by respecting and valuing our educators in words and in actions, ensuring they have what they need to succeed and listening to</p>

of Asian Americans in staff and, more importantly, in the management of HCPSS?

For the management positions of HCPSS, in addition to more efforts to recruit underrepresented Asian Americans, we should provide training and career development support to existing staffs to help them move into management positions.

them.

We need to continue to recruit educators and leadership that reflect the diversity of our community. Having a diverse teaching workforce is important. I benefited from having teachers who reflected the diversity of the city of Chicago, where I grew up. Students benefit from seeing teachers who are like them as well as teachers who are different. With the total number of people going into teaching decreasing and a smaller subset of them being non-white, diverse teaching candidates are in high demand. I think that this is another reason that our school system needs to be attractive in terms of compensation. Additionally, if our school system is forced to cut positions every year or most years, that also really hurts recruitment and retention.

We need to nurture and sustain a culture of inclusivity that celebrates the diversity of our community and is not afraid to address bias. We need diversity at all levels and diverse perspectives in decision making and leadership. I also think that fostering opportunities for mentoring, networking, and support are crucial as well. I think we can continue to find opportunities to increase our diversity as we support programs to “grow our own” teachers among current students as well as with career changers. Highlighting and 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.
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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>People today are bombarded with information and electronic communications and it is difficult to get important information to everyone who needs it. Information needs to be provided in multiple formats and venues so that people can connect with it in the way that works best for them. For some information, it might make sense to utilize paper mail. Messaging needs to be clear and concise. For example, announcements about this year's summer food service were unclear in their wording that food was to be eaten on site. That's important for those coming in to get food to know so that they can plan and not be turned away or embarrassed by misunderstanding.</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. It's great if a survey is translated into multiple languages, but if the email that directs you to the survey, or landing page of a website that takes you there isn't also translated, then it's not very accessible. Partnering with stakeholder groups like CAPA, PTACHC, CAC, SECAC, local school groups, and more should also help to amplify important messages.</p> <p>As a board member I will push to address these</p>

		<p>issues as well as do my part by sharing out information on social media to help to highlight items of importance and help the community stay informed.</p>
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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 to support student success. The Board should then explore 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>The vast majority of the school system's funding comes from the county and state. We're fortunate to benefit from the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, a historic investment in public education. However, our state's increasingly tight budget means that the Board of Education must be especially vigilant to make sure that funding is sufficient to meet the needs of Howard County students and families.</p> <p>As the Chair of the Board, I am well positioned to advocate for maintaining and increasing current levels of funding. I have strong 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</p>	<p>Advocating for a budget that prioritizes a well-rounded education is essential, recognizing the critical role these programs</p>	<p>Every student in HCPSS deserves academic support that meets their individual needs as well as meaningful extracurricular opportunities.</p>

<p>protected from budget cuts?</p>	<p>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>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. G/T classes play an important role in providing an intellectually stimulating environment for students who are already excelling in their grade-level coursework. Music and arts foster creativity, help young people discover talents and interests, and are often the first step toward a lifelong passion. My own children benefited greatly from G/T classes, strings, chorus, and more, so I hear and understand our community's commitment to continue these programs.</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 to help ensure my colleagues on the Board of Education understand the critical value of these programs.</p>
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Priority → Transportation	Candidate Julie Kaplan	Candidate Jen Mallo
<p>Should any accountability measures be considered when hiring transportation contractors?</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</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. Implementing stringent accountability measures is necessary to ensure</p>

What is the ideal timeframe for the Board to review and approve these companies?

for a thorough evaluation and ensure that any concerns can be addressed before finalizing the contracts.

that contractors prioritize student safety and adhere to agreed-upon schedules. In addition to financial penalties, contractors should be subject to regular evaluations to create a culture of continuous improvement and should routinely meet with the Office of Student Transportation to develop collaborative partnerships.

Since becoming Chair, I have enacted substantive changes to our contracting system to include accountability measures both in-house and for contractors. I have initiated technology solutions for reviewing, tracking, signing, and retaining contracts with demonstrated improvements to efficiency, timely responsiveness, and accountability. By setting high standards and holding contractors accountable, we can ensure that our students receive safe and reliable transportation.

Every contract that comes before the Board of Education should be initially reviewed well in advance of the board's vote and the contract's intended start date. To achieve this, I am working with the Office of Procurement and the Board's Audit Committee to develop a new, improved review process. This review period should also include adequate time for the public to review and provide input. Until this new process is implemented, I have worked with the new Superintendent to set expectations about having sufficient time to review bids and contracts. This proactive approach minimizes the risk of operational disruptions and fosters transparency and community trust in the

		decision-making process.
<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. There are some significant hurdles to owning our own full fleet. Foremost, HCPSS currently does not own sufficient land to house and maintain a bus fleet nor the capital dollars to purchase land and buses.</p> <p>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. A partial in-house fleet could also reduce our reliance upon transportation contractors and serve as backup when they are experiencing issues. Additionally, we could invest in environmentally friendly options like electric buses to reduce our climate footprint and provide our students with a healthier and more sustainable community to inherit.</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. Excess time spent commuting could be used for participating in extracurriculars and athletics, studying and completing homework, and getting enough sleep, which are all important factors for academic success.</p>

		<p>There are many factors in the policy that Board members must weigh to ultimately make a decision on 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>
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Priority → Staff Recruitment	Candidate Julie Kaplan	Candidate Jen Mallo
<p>How will you, as an elected official, engage in teacher compensation negotiations?</p> <p>What type of compensation can recruit and retain qualified educators?</p>	<p>As an elected official, I will engage in teacher compensation negotiations by collaborating with educators, union representatives, and stakeholders to ensure competitive salaries, performance-based incentives, professional development opportunities, and comprehensive benefits packages.</p> <p>However, teacher retention isn't only about compensation. The main issues affecting retention include increased workload and the pressure of adapting to new policies, leading to burnout and feelings of being undervalued. To address this, I advocate for targeted professional development, evaluating and potentially reducing current demands, and creating channels for open, ongoing feedback from teachers to ensure they feel heard and valued, fostering a supportive and understanding work environment.</p>	<p>We must pay our educators competitive salaries to attract the best and brightest talent, which is what Howard County students need. In recent years, HCPSS has fallen behind some of our neighboring school systems in compensation. I am working with both our county funders and the teachers' representatives to fully understand what we can afford to pay teachers as well as how much we need to pay them to be competitive.</p> <p>Taking steps toward increasing salaries and implementing supplemental programs like loan forgiveness, housing assistance, and career development ladders can enhance our appeal as an employer. Establishing relationships with strong teacher preparation programs and offering incentives such as scholarships or grants for student teachers can create a pipeline of qualified candidates eager to join the school system upon graduation. Retention of staff is equally important and can be supported by fostering a positive work environment. This includes creating robust support systems such</p>

		as mentorship programs and ongoing professional development opportunities.
<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, more importantly, in the management of HCPSS?</p>	<p>To improve diversity among teaching staff and management and make HCPSS a more attractive place to work than neighboring school systems like Montgomery and PG County, we need to implement innovative and distinctive strategies. 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>Students learn best when they can see themselves represented in their classroom and in their curricula. Asian Americans are one of the fastest growing groups in Howard County, in Maryland, and in the United States. It is only fitting that the demographics of our teachers and administrators—as well as policy committees and advisory councils—should reflect this diversity. We must implement robust recruitment strategies that include active engagement with Asian American communities and organizations.</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. My graduate and undergraduate degrees are in East Asian Studies, so I have studied Asian cultures extensively and value the rich diversity that is missed when we have continued underrepresentation of Asian Americans.</p>

Priority → Transparency	Candidate Julie Kaplan	Candidate Jen Mallo
<p>What steps will you take to increase communication between the Board, parents,</p>	<p>There are many vehicles available to the BoE and the community, and we need to use them more effectively.</p>	<p>As a board member, I frequently attend community events and make myself available to students, parents and guardians, and</p>

<p>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. By focusing on trust and transparency, we can build a stronger, more connected school community.</p>	<p>educators. I also actively respond to questions, comments, and concerns sent to my public board email address.</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.</p> <p>Nobody should feel like every communication from their school or school system is carefully scripted. I hope to work with our new Superintendent to expand opportunities to connect directly with our families. We must create accessible spaces for community members to engage with Board members and discuss important issues.</p>
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DISTRICT 5

Priority → Budgeting	Candidate Andrea Chamblee	Candidate Trent Kittleman
<p>What potential sources of funding should the school board explore? How will you use your position to advocate for such funding?</p>		<p>There are no easy answers to the current budget challenge, but there are some ways to address it. First, HCPSS must seriously pursue using a Public Private Partnership (P-3) to address our capital needs. Although P-3s aren't always the answer, they enabled Prince George's county to build six new schools in three years, without requiring the normal amount of upfront money capital construction</p>

		<p>generally requires.</p> <p>Second, I think the Board should explore transferring some or all of its health-related positions to the County. HCPSS employs 92 psychologists, 82 occupational and physical therapists, 87 nurses, and 70 health assistants. If you add in school counselors, school social workers, and similar jobs, the total is over 650 employees. HCPSS also contracts with outside mental and physical health providers.</p> <p>And third, do a complete reexamination of the budget to see if there is a better way to deliver and pay for the services the school provides. Often, a zero-based budget can uncover any fat that has developed over the years.</p>
<p>How will you ensure that early-year GT programs, music and art programs, etc. are protected from budget cuts?</p>		<p>Focus spending on teaching a 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.</p> <p>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, and if the description is apt, is this the right priority?</p>

Priority → Transportation	Candidate Andrea Chamblee	Candidate Trent Kittleman
<p>Should any accountability measures be considered when hiring transportation contractors?</p> <p>What is the ideal timeframe for the Board to review and approve these companies?</p>		<p>Unless there is a good and valid reason for not doing so, every contract HCPSS enters into 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 purpose of any redistricting is to balance out the numbers of students among schools that are severely overcrowded with those that are under capacity. 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 inequity, such as any group being unnecessarily scheduled for longer</p>

		rides than average or later return home trips.
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Priority → Staff Recruitment	Candidate Andrea Chamblee	Candidate Trent Kittleman
<p>How will you, as an elected official, engage in teacher compensation negotiations?</p> <p>What type of compensation can recruit and retain qualified educators?</p>		<p>Teacher compensation has, essentially, been taken out of the hands of the Board. It is now set both by the union negotiations and by the legislature. As a former labor attorney, I would hope to represent the Board in negotiations with the 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. The workload and responsibilities of teachers has been growing for some time; in general, people become teachers because they want to educate children. If they can no longer devote sufficient time to do the job of educating as well as they need to, the job will hold little incentive to 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, more importantly, in the management of HCPSS?</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>
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Priority → Transparency	Candidate Andrea Chamblee	Candidate Trent Kittleman
<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 so that parents could actually learn something by watching. Currently, the meetings are too structured, too rigid, and too boring. There should be some minimal engagement with the Public Forum speakers, and there needs to be some minimal discussion of Consent agenda items, even if it is just a descriptive statement. 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 suffers from information overload. It can be very difficult to find what you’re looking for. It needs to be revised, at the very least, to add a site</p>

		map and to retool the search engine to perform far better than it does.
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