



**Questionnaire for School Board Candidates Seeking Endorsement  
Fairfax County Democratic Committee—2023 Elections**

*Please return to FCDC electronically by email to your filing point of contact when you file your other filing materials and no later than 5 pm on April 6, 2023.*

Name: **MATEO DUNNE**  
District or At-Large: MOUNT VERNON DISTRICT

***Provide a brief background statement that demonstrates why you believe you are best suited to serve on the Fairfax County School Board. This should include, but is not limited to, the following:***

**Why You Decided To Run For This Office**

I am running to become the Mount Vernon District Representative on the Fairfax County School Board. I am a proud Democrat, a first-time political candidate, and a lifelong advocate for children, families, and teachers.

I was not planning to run before Karen Corbett Sanders announced her retirement. I felt called to serve because for many years I have been advocating for fully funding FCPS, increased pay for teachers, and increased resources for students. I believe in serving the community and leaving it better than I found it.

At a time when FCPS faces many challenges, I believe that I have the experience and vision to renew the promise of public education and ensure that every child receives a world-class education, so they can realize the American Dream. My campaign slogan is "Excellent Schools Every Day in Every Way, which aptly summarizes my beliefs and values. In an era of political polarization, we need to focus on students, parents, and the community.

I come from a family of educators. My grandmother and mother were teachers. My sister, sister-in-law, and brother-in-law are teachers, and my wife is a former teacher and currently the director of a preschool. As a volunteer, I have taught religious education, and I have coached hundreds of kids in soccer.

I understand the transformative power of education. My in-laws, who I consider to be my parents, arrived in this country with only a 4th Grade education, but because their three daughters worked hard and went to good schools, all three of them went to college and entered the middle class. In my own life, my father died when I was 18, which left our family in a precarious financial position and compelled me to rely on student loans to pay for college and law school. For both me and my wife, good schools and hard work enabled us to achieve the American Dream.

I am honored and humbled to have received endorsements from local leaders who I have admired for a long time, such as Sen. Scott Surovell, Del. Paul Krizek, Supervisor Dan Storck, School Board Member Karen Corbett Sanders, School Board Member Stella Pekarsky, Chairman Jeff McKay, and former Chairman Sharon Bulova.

**Your Professional, Educational, And Public Service Background**

**PROFESSION:**

- I have served as an attorney for 20 years.
- From 2004 to 2009, I worked for large law firms in Washington, DC. I litigated to protect U.S. companies against unfair trade practices and intellectual property right infringement by Chinese companies.
- From 2010 to 2012, I played a leading role in the startup of a \$400 million Federal agency.
- From 2012 to 2014, I served as Chief Operating Officer for a \$2 billion Federal agency. I led a comprehensive overhaul of the agency, to include the creation and implementation of streamlined business processes.
- From 2014 to 2021, I served as a senior attorney for the U.S. Department of Defense, to include as lead attorney for appropriations, legislation, and international law for a \$10 billion Defense agency.
- Currently, I serve as Staff Counsel for a nonprofit venture capital firm that invests strategically in frontier technologies to promote our national security.

**EDUCATION:**

- In 2002, I graduated from Georgetown University with a J.D. and M.S. with Distinction.
- In 1998, I graduated *summa cum laude* from Emory University with a M.A. and B.A.

**PUBLIC SERVICE:**

- I was a public servant for 12 years, to include 4 years with the U.S. Department of Energy and 8 years with the U.S. Department of Energy.

**Your Background in Education (As A Student, Teacher, Staff, Etc.)**

- I have been a member of the Fort Hunt ES PTA, Carl Sandburg MS PTA, and West Potomac HS PTSA.
- From 2009 to 2019, I served as a soccer coach for youth recreational soccer teams.

- From 2015 to 2016, I co-led a county-wide coalition to achieve the largest budget increase for FCPS in a decade. I organized dozens of speakers at public hearings, thousands of letters and emails, and a 500-person rally at the Fairfax County Government Center.
- From 2015 to 2020, I served as a religious education instructor for 5th and 6th Grade students.
- In 2017, I played a leading role in the “Yes Meals Tax” campaign to diversify revenue sources for the County and provide additional funding to FCPS.
- From 2017 to 2023, I served as the Education Liaison for the Stratford Landing Citizens Association.
- From 2017 to 2019, I served as Vice President of Advocacy for the Fairfax County Council PTA (FCCPTA), representing 170+ PTAs with 40,000 members and 188,000 students at the state and local levels.
- From 2017 to 2021, I led multiple successful School Bond campaigns in the Mount Vernon District to fund the construction and renovation of public schools.
- From 2018 to 2021, I served as Chair of the Design & Construction Committee for West Potomac HS’s \$35 million capacity enhancement, which added 71,000 s.f. to eliminate 18 trailers and resolved significant overcrowding.
- In 2018, I was named as Dan Storck’s inaugural Mount Vernon District Community Champion.

**Any Personal Connections to Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS)**

- My wife and I moved to Fairfax County in 2004, so our children could attend Fairfax County Public Schools. Our three children--Evelyn, Matt Jr., and Nicolas--attended FCPS since 1st Grade: Fort Hunt ES, Carl Sandburg MS, and West Potomac HS.
  - Evelyn graduated from West Potomac HS last year. She was the Battalion Commander of the West Potomac HS Army JROTC program. She is currently a freshman in the Corps of Cadets at Virginia Tech.
  - Matt Jr. is a senior at West Potomac HS. He enlisted in the Army National Guard in October and will go to basic training after graduating in June.
  - Nicolas is a sophomore at West Potomac HS.

**What You Believe The Role And Responsibility Of A School Board Member To Be**

First and foremost, I believe the role and responsibility of a School Board Member is to ensure that all children receive a world-class education, so they can realize their full potential and are well-prepared for the workforce or higher education.

An important role and responsibility for a School Board Member is constituent services. Having worked in a local Congressional office (and as a parent of three children in FCPS), I have seen firsthand the wide array of issues that can arise with individual students and families. The School Board Member plays an essential role in helping students and families to navigate the FCPS bureaucracy to obtain desired outcomes and services.

More generally, I believe the role and responsibility of a School Board Member is:

- To consult with the community early and often;
- To listen to community concerns and priorities;
- To learn about the needs of different families and students as well as administrators, teachers, and staff;
- To serve as an effective advocate for community concerns and priorities;
- To ensure that taxpayer dollars are spent wisely;
- To ensure FCPS is operating efficiently and effectively to deliver a world-class education to every child;
- To ensure FCPS provides robust programming at every school to enable students to participate in the arts, athletics, music, and STEM events;
- To ensure FCPS provides a safe and inclusive environment for every child; and
- To ensure FCPS provides wraparound services for children in need to provide them with maximum opportunity to succeed in school and in life.

***Answer the following questions. Please try to limit responses to each question to no more than half of a single-spaced page.***

***1. Please list and explain your top five priorities if elected.***

- **Safe and inclusive schools for all children**, to include comprehensive education campaigns for students and families with respect to bullying, drug abuse, sexual assault, and violence;
- **Providing a world-class education for all children**, to include full implementation of the 2020 AAP Study and 2021 Comprehensive Special Education Audit;
- **Recruiting and retaining the best teachers** through increased pay and empowering teachers to educate our children instead of teaching to the test;

- **Expansion of dual-enrollment courses** to enable students to graduate with an associate degree; and
- **Increasing the number of school counselors**, at least 1 per 200 students, in accordance with the recommendations of the American School Counselor Association.

**2. Over the last few years, there has been increased scrutiny on public schools. Concurrently, nationwide we are seeing attrition among teachers and staff at exceptionally high levels and unusually high numbers of teachers terminating their contracts mid-year. How can we ensure that FCPS operates in a way that attracts and retains a robust, exceptional, and diverse teaching and administrative force?**

I believe if we enable teachers to experience the joy of teaching, then students will experience the joy of learning. If elected, I will advocate for FCPS to:

- Honor teachers as professionals;
- Provide teachers with the highest pay in Northern Virginia;
- Empower teachers to educate our children instead of teaching to the test;
- Ensure every teacher has full use of their planning time, without infringement by administrative burdens and meetings;
- Establish additional time (separate from planning time) for collaboration within and across departments; and
- Assign school counselors (instead of math and history teachers) to teach Family Life Education and Social Emotional Learning;
- Conduct an independent study of the administrative burdens imposed on teachers, so FCPS can eliminate unnecessary burdens that distract teachers from their core mission of educating our children.

Through the negotiation of the Collective Bargaining Agreement, FCPS should seek to:

- Establish a career ladder that provides teachers with opportunities for advancement inside the classroom as well as increased compensation, recognition, and responsibilities;
- Establish financial incentives for experienced teachers to teach (and remain) in Title I schools;

- Establish a tuition reimbursement program to reward teachers who remain with FCPS for 7 years; and
- Ensure full reimbursement for the purchase of school supplies, so teachers do not have to pay for school supplies out of pocket.

In addition, FCPS should work with the County to identify opportunities to expand workforce housing available to teachers and staff. I strongly believe that public servants—from teachers and custodians to police and firefighters—who work daily to maintain the quality of life in Fairfax County should have the option to live in Fairfax County with their families.

I would also advocate for an independent evaluation of the needs-based staffing formula to determine if adjustments are required to provide additional teachers for students in need.

**3. *Fairfax County Public Schools serves over 180,000 students from diverse backgrounds including religious and ethnic minorities, LGBTQIA+ students, students with disabilities, profoundly gifted students, twice exceptional students, and students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. How will you ensure that every FCPS student is “met by name and by need”?***

Our diversity is our greatest strength. Families move to Fairfax County because it has a diverse population, a high quality of life, and a public school system that is internationally recognized for academic excellence. Employers move to Fairfax County because they are seeking a well-educated, multilingual workforce that is prepared to compete in the global marketplace.

Here is what I believe:

- FCPS should provide a safe and inclusive environment for every child;
- FCPS should provide a world-class education to every child;
- FCPS should never compromise on high expectations and high standards;
- FCPS should provide every child with the opportunity to identify and develop their interests and strengths; and
- FCPS should provide wraparound services for every child in need to help them realize their full potential.

To meet every child by name and by need, FCPS should:

- Ensure the Young Scholars program is implemented fully and consistently in all elementary schools and middle schools;

- Require every teacher to have professional development on advanced learning and learners, neurodiversity, and students with special needs;
- Hold principals accountable for the success of the Young Scholars program by including program goals on their annual School Improvement Plan;
- Increase the number of Advanced Academic Resource Teachers to 1.0 FTE at every elementary school and middle school;
- Develop SMART milestones for holding regional superintendents and principals accountable for developing academic talent in every region and school;
- Conduct an independent study to establish one or more magnet schools in or near the Mount Vernon District;
- Expand dual-enrollment courses to enable students to graduate with an associate degree;
- Expand Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs to prepare students for the workforce;
- Expand language immersion programs, especially two-way immersion programs;
- Empower teachers to educate our children instead of teaching to the test; and
- Conduct an independent evaluation of the needs-based staffing formula to determine if adjustments are required to provide additional teachers for students in need.

***4. While the school board is a nonpartisan role, in the current political climate, public education has been subject to a great deal of partisan politicization and FCPS has seen a great deal of national media coverage. Are you prepared for this? How will you manage this both professionally and personally?***

The Virginia Constitution states:

That free government rests, as does all progress, upon the broadest possible diffusion of knowledge, and that the Commonwealth should avail itself of those talents which nature has sown so liberally among its people by assuring the opportunity for their fullest development by an effective system of education.

I believe that our democracy and our freedom, our continued progress as a civilization and society, and our shared economic prosperity is dependent upon efficient and effective public schools.

FCPS faces unprecedented challenges, to include: a shortage of qualified teachers; a persistent achievement gap; learning loss; a mental health crisis among students; and increasing prevalence of illegal drugs. To overcome these challenges, we must focus on our children, families, and teachers. We should mobilize to ensure every child receives a world-class education and has access to the necessary resources to be successful inside and outside of the classroom. We should also mobilize to hire and retain the best and brightest as educators.

I have the experience and vision to effectively represent (and advocate on behalf of) my community before the School Board, the Board of Supervisors, and other audiences. I am a seasoned litigator who has represented U.S. companies before Federal agencies and courts, State agencies and courts, and international tribunals. In addition, I have more than a decade of experience working with government executives, legislators and legislative staff, and reporters. Finally, I have spoken to a wide range of audiences on a diverse array of issues.

I am ready to fight tooth and nail, day in and day out, to defend our children and our public schools against political attacks. I will work tirelessly to renew the promise of public education and ensure every child receives a world-class education. I am committed to delivering Excellent Schools Every Day in Every Way, so every child can realize the American Dream.

***5. What challenges need to be overcome for FCPS to close opportunity and achievement gaps in accordance with the One Fairfax policy framework?***

We must face the stubborn reality that:

- Many children do not have enough food to eat at home, especially on weekends and during the summer;
- Many children have parents who are new to this country and may not have received the same educational opportunities in their home country;
- Many children suffer from health issues ranging from anxiety and depression to drugs and trauma; and
- There is a persistent academic achievement gap.

Here is my core belief: every child deserves a world-class education, so they have the opportunity to realize the American Dream. We must meet every child where they are and provide them with the resources to be successful inside and outside of the classroom and to be



prepared for the workforce or higher education. I will be relentless in challenging FCPS to be more efficient and effective, to meet the needs of every child, to ensure every school is performing in accordance with this essential mission.

I understand the transformative power of education. My in-laws, who I consider to be my parents, arrived in this country with only a 4th Grade education, but because their three daughters worked hard and went to good schools, all three of them went to college and entered the middle class. In my own life, my father died when I was 18, which left our family in a precarious financial position and compelled me to rely on student loans to pay for college and law school. For both me and my wife, good schools and hard work enabled us to achieve the American Dream.

To begin to close the achievement gap, FCPS should:

- Ensure the Young Scholars program is implemented fully and consistently in all elementary schools and middle schools;
- Require every teacher to have professional development on advanced learning and learners, including for twice exceptional students;
- Hold principals accountable for the success of the Young Scholars program by including program goals on their annual School Improvement Plan;
- Increase the number of Advanced Academic Resource Teachers to 1.0 FTE at every elementary school and middle school;
- Conduct an independent study to establish one or more magnet schools in or near the Mount Vernon District;
- Expand dual-enrollment courses to enable students to graduate with an associate degree;
- Expand Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs to prepare students for the workforce;
- Expand language immersion programs, especially two-way immersion programs;
- Empower teachers to educate our children instead of teaching to the test; and
- Conduct an independent evaluation of the needs-based staffing formula to determine if adjustments are required to provide additional teachers for students in need.

**6. *What are some things you want to learn more about that can help you serve the school division?***

I would like to meet regularly with every school community to learn more about their challenges, needs, and priorities. In the coming weeks and months, I plan to meet with the principal and PTA/PTO for every elementary, middle, and high school in the South County, Mount Vernon, and West Potomac pyramids. In addition, I plan to meet with the principals and PTA/PTO of schools outside of the Mount Vernon District which are attended by a substantial number of Mount Vernon District students, such as Hayfield HS and Edison HS.

In addition, I would like to begin a granular review of the FCPS budget and operations to identify opportunities to achieve cost savings and efficiencies and to adopt best practices and lessons learned from the best public school systems in the United States and overseas.

Finally, I would like to consult extensively with parents and outside experts to understand how FCPS can strengthen its programs and protocols to more effectively address absenteeism, anxiety, bullying, depression, drugs, sexual assault, trauma, and violence.

**7. *Members of the School Board are expected to engage with and take input from students, parents, teachers, and other community members. How would you stay connected with the school community to ensure FCPS's governance is in line with community priorities?***

If elected, I plan to:

- Consult with the community early and often;
- Listen to community concerns and priorities;
- Learn about the needs of different families and students as well as administrators, teachers, and staff; and
- Serve as an effective advocate for community concerns and priorities.

I plan to spend most of my time at all three high school pyramids instead of at Gatehouse Administration Center. Specifically, I plan to:

- Meet with the principal for every elementary, middle, and high school in the Mount Vernon District on a regular basis;
- Meet with the PTA/PTO for every elementary, middle, and high school in the Mount Vernon District on a regular basis;

- Meet with the student advisory panel for every high school pyramid in the Mount Vernon District on a regular basis; and
- Meet with the designated Ambassadors for each high school pyramid in the Mount Vernon District on a regular basis.

I plan to host regular town halls in person and/or online to enable students, parents, and community members to identify and discuss issues of concern. I also plan to respond timely to individual emails sent to my FCPS account.

I also plan to engage regularly with the local business community, to build strong relationships between particular businesses and schools, to strengthen career and technical education courses to meet employer requirements, and ensure that FCPS is working daily to contribute to our shared prosperity.