



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: **Kyle McDaniel**

District or At-Large: At-Large

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
- Your professional, educational, and public service background
- Your background in education (as a student, teacher, staff, etc.)
- Any personal connections to Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS)
- What you believe the role and responsibility of a School Board member to be

I am running to address two unique, but related, challenges and to bring collegiality and collaboration to our School Board. With the rise in attacks on public education, the next School Board will have challenges that are both political and policy related. On the one hand we face the policy dilemma of addressing the academic, mental health, and behavioral challenges resulting from the COVID pandemic. On the other, we face the political challenges resulting from Republicans and right-wing agitators. Protecting kids, parents, teachers and staff, while building a world class school system for all kids regardless of zip code or school will be my top priorities.

As an entrepreneur, I bring a unique work ethic to the job, and an instinct for innovation and creativity. I have served in a host of capacities within the community over the last decade to include multiple Fairfax County and FCPS boards and commissions. My academic resume includes a BS in Public Administration, and a Master of Public Administration; both with a focus on public finance, and state and local governance.

As a father of two daughters, I am directly invested in the success of FCPS. I am the only candidate in the race with young children newly entering FCPS. As a parent entering the school division for the first time, I bring a unique, and to-date lacking point of view: that of a parent learning to navigate complex systems for the first time. This also allows me to identify

and empathize with the challenges faced by military families who are also new to FCPS.

I will wake up every morning remembering that my number one job is to work collaboratively to protect and educate kids across Fairfax County and support our teachers and staff. My number two job as a school board member? Taking care of constituents and listening to the public.

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.
 - a. Remediating COVID-related academic gaps, so each child can live up to their full potential.
 - b. Building on the traction of the current school board to continue to address the mental health challenges that plague students, parents, teachers and staff through innovative collaboration with the government and nonprofit sectors.
 - c. Implementing trauma-informed approaches to equitably address disruptions to the learning environment that shortchange our students and place undue burdens on our teachers and staff.
 - d. Eliminating school meal debt and providing free meals for all students, because no child can learn and grow on an empty stomach.
 - e. Continuing to improve our world-class public school division by advancing policies that encourage parental involvement, high achievement, and equitable outcomes for all students.
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?

Teacher retention will continue to be a critical issue going forward, and the next school board should start by listening. There need to be listening sessions with teachers and staff to better understand the reasons for attrition so that we can begin to implement policies that provide them with better support. We need to gain the trust of school-based staff through open and candid communication and by making impactful changes. Happy, respected, protected, and equitably compensated teachers

are empowered to do what they love -- teach.

Teacher happiness is directly correlated to the academic achievement of students. As a top-ranked school system in the country, we have a golden opportunity -- and are perfectly positioned -- to recruit and retain the nation's best teaching talent. Recruitment events, building pipelines with Virginia's outstanding teacher education programs, and collaborating with our existing teacher cadre to help in recruitment are all options on the table, but we must cultivate and maintain the trust of our instructional staff.

Now that collective bargaining has been approved, we need to work closely with the bargaining units to ensure a fair and equitable contract for all staff. There is no doubt that union jobs are high quality, high pay, and lead to better working environments. A robust and competitive union contract is a natural -- and overdue -- first step to addressing teacher recruitment and retention issues.

Finally, steady leadership and collaboration from the school board will go a long way to easing some of the anxiety our teachers feel daily. They need to trust that we have their backs, and that we will listen.

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?"

Fairfax County is home to over 1.1 million people; it is a diverse county with vast inequities. We must craft policies that are designed around this simple truth. Whether to a single constituent, or an association representing thousands, the importance of involving stakeholders in the policy process cannot be overstated. For example, when attempting to correct inequities around ESL students and the associated barriers to learning, we need to involve the communities for which English is not a first language in those discussions.

The school board must recognize that in order to "meet students by name and need," they need to adopt a "not about us, without us" approach to policy making. This is especially important when it comes to students with disabilities; FCPS has a responsibility to maintain an inclusive environment in which students with disabilities have the support they need to learn. Inclusive policymaking is pointless without consistent implementation division wide. There are many programs available for students with disabilities, but inconsistent utilization and implementation is a major barrier that the next board will need to tackle. This also touches on teacher recruitment and retention as we navigate an acute shortage of special education teachers.

Serving those you represent is a core tenet of holding public office. It requires long hours and a tenacious attitude. School board members must be willing to learn about unfamiliar policy areas. We are fortunate in Fairfax County to have many, many smart and talented people who are passionate about their interests and causes. Listening, learning, and putting in long hours on their behalf is how we meet each student's unique needs.

As a school board candidate, I will collaborate with my colleagues to protect students from political attacks. LGBTQIA+ students have recently faced politicized and alarming attacks by the right wing. In order to truly meet students by "need and by name," the school board bears the responsibility of nurturing an inclusive and safe environment. Students who do not feel safe will not be open to learning. We must recognize this challenge and address it head on.

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?

Am I prepared? Yes. In fact, I have already suffered from attacks from right-wing agitators. It is important for anyone running for School Board to recognize the politically charged nature of holding this office, especially in Fairfax County over the next four-year term. In the current political moment, we will face four years of back-to-back political attacks by operatives who do not care about education, but do care about their candidates in local, state, and federal races.

Additionally, it is worth noting that attacks against me, should I end up serving, will not in any way influence my votes or decisions. I am completely focused on policy development to build and sustain a world-class educational experience for every student. No right wing attacks will deter me in that mission. Over the years I have developed a thick skin, and I have insulated my career and livelihood from political and personal attacks. I will wake up every morning and remember that my sole focus is not on the nasty attacks, but on the students whose futures depend on good schools.

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

The One Fairfax policy framework was a simple, yet profound policy document. It quite literally was one piece of paper front and back that set the tone for the next generation of Fairfax County leadership. Sometimes a simple statement of our values is more effective than lengthy whitepapers and volumes of data. I want to be clear that students in every pyramid in all five FCPS regions must have the same resources and opportunities. This was the simple concept that One Fairfax affirmed, and it's a

concept that I am personally anxious to continue pursuing, especially as an at-large candidate.

To address opportunity and achievement gaps, we must first identify them. This starts by going out into the communities and schools, listening, and looking for myself. For example, advanced mathematics should exist across Fairfax County and not just in certain regions or pyramids. We have to do a better job recognizing and identifying the inequities that do in fact exist within our communities. Sometimes these inequities are as arbitrary as what side of a road a child happens to live on. That is fundamentally wrong.

Finally, innovative problem solving, and thinking outside the box are key. We have incredible talent in our students, and there is no reason we can't hold competitions when we identify a challenge to engage with kids and get their ideas. Leveraging the collective "brain trust" of the community will be important.

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

Everything. No one ever knows it all, and I am always learning. I want to engage with teachers and staff on a personal level to truly understand their unique roles and how they go about doing their jobs. This means showing up at the bus yard at 5am and learning how the bus drivers go about their work. It means walking into the kitchens and learning how the cooks do their jobs. I subscribe to the philosophy that we can always do better, and that starts with learning through listening and doing.

Some specific items I would like to immediately engage with early on are curriculum development, and information technology governance. I would also like to become intimately familiar with pedagogical processes employed by FCPS in day-to-day teaching.

Finally, as an at-large candidate, I believe it is very important for me to get out of my "home area" and visit every pyramid to learn about the unique strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and talents within the pyramids. Fairfax County is blessed to be so diverse, and we recognize it as a strength. But in our strength come unique challenges. I am anxious to meet them head on, by committing to personally spending a day in every school within my first year in office.

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?

As an entrepreneur, I love hearing feedback from my customers. Whether good, bad,

or ugly, I truly value and welcome it. Feedback not only affirms what I am doing right, but it helps me to improve and innovate. I view my role on the school board in the same light: constituents are like customers – they are always number one.

I do not subscribe to the conventional wisdom of elected hierarchy that at-large members should defer constituent services to the district members. That philosophy misses the point entirely. We are elected to serve, and we should serve to the greatest extent possible. We are not a last resort, but an additional source of support.

I will use electronic media such as social media, Zoom meetings, email newsletters, and other communication tools to solicit feedback from and communicate with the greatest number of constituents possible. I will also make myself available to the community through PTAs and PTOs, teacher associations, neighborhood and civic associations, opportunity zones, nonprofits, and faith communities. I will also build working relationships with other elected officials, especially the Board of Supervisors, and working with them is a priority.