



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: Ilryong Moon

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

Although I retired from the School Board in 2019 after 20 years of service, I have determined that this year, more than ever, we need strong, experienced, and respected School Board members. The last three years have been difficult for all of our students, families, and school staff in Fairfax County. The negative impacts of the pandemic were real and serious, and they remain with us today. Communities have been divided over numerous issues.

I have the experience, temperament, passion, work ethic, knowledge, and maturity to work with people with diverse opinions and backgrounds. I am a listener and a uniter, and I can make tough decisions while still ensuring people feel that they are heard and their opinions matter.

I am an immigrant who arrived from Korea at the age of 17 in 1974. Korea was a poor country back then, and my family was even poorer. As an ESL student, I had to study hard, and my parents, who lacked English language skills, worked hard to support our family and champion the education of their three children. Education meant everything to us. Neither of my parents received much formal education. My father did not get to finish high school due to the Korean War and my mother, growing up in a poor rural part of Korea, only received a second-grade education; but they knew that the education was going to be the key to their children's success, ensuring that all three of us went to college.

I attended Harvard for my undergraduate degree and William and Mary for law school and have been practicing law locally since 1984. But, as a father of two sons who graduated from the Fairfax County Public Schools, I am most proud of my decision to serve the public. It was

important to work with my neighbors to improve the community and that immigrants should have that opportunity as well. My decision to serve has provided me with opportunities to work as a School Board member and a planning commissioner in Fairfax County for almost 25 years, which has been the honor of a lifetime.

I am very familiar with the role and responsibility of a School Board member, having served in that role for over 20 years. It is responsible for development of all policies and budgets, and, ultimately, personnel decisions and programs that the school system provides to its students. As elected officials, school board members need to constantly communicate with and engage the communities they are elected to represent. The school board is the final decision maker of all education-related decisions on the local level.

Fairfax County Public Schools is an excellent school system, but it can be better. I want to continue my efforts to help all our students be well prepared to enter the next phase of their life when they graduate. That will be my solemn duty. I am an experienced, progressive and pragmatic voice that the next board will need.

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. **Academics**

This is the core mission of the school system, and we should put our best efforts to prepare our students to enter the next phase of their lives when they graduate.

- Providing all students fair and equitable opportunities and programs meeting their needs to help them achieve their full potential.
- Offering more learning and enrichment opportunities during summer, winter, and other breaks.
- Expanding preschool programs and early access to reading.
- Reducing achievement and opportunity gaps.
- Ensuring our special needs students--ones with disabilities, in poverty, or learning English as a non-native language--are provided appropriate services, including inclusion practices.
- Continuing to help our students develop the skills to succeed in 21st century economy like creative, collaborative, problem solving, analytical, and technological skills they need in the global community.
- Expanding our programs for 'trades for tomorrow' where students are introduced to and learn practical job skills needed in the job market.

b. Teachers and Support Staff

High-quality teachers and support staff are keys to student success. We should be leading statewide and national efforts to elevate stature of our teachers and treat them as true professionals.

- Recruiting and retaining the best teachers and school employees.
- Compensating our teachers and employees fairly and providing them safe and healthy working conditions.
- Providing teachers adequate planning time, professional development opportunities, and any support they need.
- Ensuring that class sizes and workloads are reasonable, and eliminating unnecessary tasks that take away their focus from the core mission.
- Making sure we have implemented a successful collective bargaining mechanism.
- Collaborating with local, state and federal governments to make the investments in teacher salary and working conditions a top priority.
- Expanding our programs for 'teach for tomorrow' to encourage our students to explore and consider teaching as their career so that we can grow more of our own teachers.

c. Working with Families and Community

Families are partners in educating our students, and everyone should treat them as such. They must be provided with adequate information and tools to help their students at home. Our communities are resourceful, and we need to work with them more closely to tap their resources for our students' education.

- Improving our communication with and support of parents so that they can better help their children at home.
- Working with communities to optimize resources to support our students.
- Building relationships with businesses and organizations to provide real world experience to students.
- Ensuring school infrastructure can support and benefit the communities they serve.
- Increasing opportunities for parents and community members to provide input in developing policies and budget.

d. Student Health and Safety

Student mental health has been an issue for many years, but the pandemic has elevated our concerns about this problem. We must make sure that our students are provided with a safe and healthy learning environment free of fear from harm.

- Ensuring our students have a safe and healthy learning environment.

- Providing schools more resources such as counselors and psychologists to be able to deal with safety and mental health issues.
- Implementing and expanding middle school sports.
- Strengthening education related to drug use and improving dialogue with families and communities on drug use.
- Keeping our school operations environmentally friendly.

e. Facilities

The conditions of many of our school facilities are not optimal and they need to be improved to ensure we are giving our students the best possible environment to succeed.

- Ensuring that facilities are safe and up to date.
- Addressing overcrowding issues.
- Continuing to reduce trailers used for instruction.
- Working with the local and state governments to secure increased funding to renovate and build schools in more timely manner.
- Maximizing the efficiency of use of construction fund.
- Continuing our efforts with the County government to achieve our sustainability goals.

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?

Recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers is paramount to the education of our students. Curriculum, technology, and other tools that we provide our students are important; but it is the teachers who directly interact with our students on daily basis. Our teachers need to be fairly and adequately compensated and supported.

Salaries should be increased to the level that we consider to be commensurate with our expectation of them being professionals. Workloads need to be reduced. We will have to closely review what can be taken off from their plates so that they can focus on the core mission of teaching our students. They need to be provided with sufficient planning time and professional growth opportunities. Staff development should be based upon what they truly need instead of coming from top down.

As a long-term goal, we need to elevate the teacher compensation issue as a national conversation. Investing in teachers should be considered as an investment in nation building-education is the foundation of our nation and communities. We need to make

coordinated efforts among all levels of government-federal, state, and local so that we can attract and retain top college graduates to come to teaching.

As to increasing the diversity among teachers, we must do a better job of proactively reaching out to underrepresented communities. As the parents have the most influence on their children, we must engage parents along with their children in encouraging them to consider teaching as careers. They may not have all relevant information related to benefits of teaching.

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?”

I believe that every student, no matter their background, is entitled to the best education so that they can achieve their full potential. This will require more diverse programs meeting individual needs and working more closely with the parents to better understand each student’s needs. In 2015, I fought for FCPS’s non-discrimination policy when the school board was confronted with vocal opposition from some members of the community. I know how to fight for fairness, equity, and principles and do the right things for our students.

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?

I have more than 20 years’ experience of serving on the board and have dealt with many difficult issues in the past. Some of those issues included the teaching of creationism in classes; a debate on phonics versus whole language in teaching reading; family life education (FLE) programs; book banning; LGBTQ issues; and charter schools and school vouchers. It has not always been easy, but I had been able to handle them both professionally and personally.

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

We need to communicate better with communities that the One Fairfax Policy is not intended and not being implemented to discriminate against any student or group of students. The policy exists so that all students have equitable opportunities and access to receive the best education meeting their needs. Each student has different needs, but those needs should all be met in the best ways possible. One of the areas that I want to focus on is to help our families better so that they can in turn help their

children better at home. They should be provided with all necessary information and tools to help guide their children in the best possible ways at home. Opportunity gaps start at home and the school system could do a better job to reduce those gaps.

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

I have been off the school board for the last three years. I will need to catch up on what I have missed. However, I have been already studying the budget and CIP and, as a member of the Core Planning Team, I have also been participating for the last several months in FCPS's efforts to develop new strategic plans. I have been also regularly meeting with the superintendent to share my thoughts on various different issues that the school system is faced with.

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?

I will have an open-door policy. I will hold regular community hours, either in small groups or a larger setting. Communication should be two ways, but information sharing is still important. I will not flood the parents and communities with the information that is already being provided by other school board members or the superintendent; but, instead, I will focus on what is the most critical and what may be being overlooked. I will also form various advisory groups to learn new get ideas from them and also hear their feedback on what I may be or am thinking of working.

Date of Submission: April 5, 2023

By: Ilryong Moon