



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: Harold E. Sims Jr.

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
- 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 because I'm up to the task of protecting public education, ensuring that all voices are heard and diverse views are considered. As I considered running, I remembered the tough but necessary choice my late mother made to transfer my sister and I from out of state and move to the Commonwealth of Virginia, so that we could obtain a premier education in a safe environment. I believe that my diverse experiences as a parent, public servant and clergyman will prove to be vital and impactful in service of a diverse community like Mount Vernon.

I am the dream of my late grandmother, Josephine who lived to be 97 years young. She was a descendant of a people who were enslaved here on a plantation in the Commonwealth of Virginia. She taught me what it meant to be resilient – as a woman who refused to give up and fought for basic human rights, to include the right to vote and to have the right to a public education.

It is because of that resilience that I am the product of a public school education. It is also because of that resilience that while working full-time and raising a family, I was able to attend community college, transfer to earn a Bachelor of Science Degree in Criminal Justice Administration & Management, go on to earn a master's degree and begin my doctoral studies. Over the past two decades I have devoted my life to service in the Commonwealth of Virginia as a Law Enforcement Professional. As a Division First Sergeant I am currently responsible for the

professional development and accountability of division supervisors and deputies. As an experienced adjunct Instructor at the Prince William County Public Safety Training Academy, I have experience teaching new law enforcement officers seeking a professional certification in accordance with the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services regulations and training standards.

As a licensed and ordained Itinerant Elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, I have served as a Youth Pastor/Director of Youth Ministries, and Senior Pastor of a congregation and Ecumenical Representative in community organizations. As a community leader in these capacities, I had the opportunity and privilege to serve diverse communities and walk with families from diverse backgrounds through challenges and crises. I also served as the Chairman and CEO of nonprofits, responsible for their daily administration and management. This experience has been vital in developing my ability to build bridges, find common ground and have the temperament needed to have the difficult but necessary conversations in life.

As parents, my wife and I raised five children in Fairfax County. Three of our five children are now adults; one of which is a current FCPS employee, and one who is on deployment in the United States Airforce. My wife and I still have two children in elementary school and we have both served as members of the PTA and supported our children in extracurricular activities in Fairfax County. Our family has been personally impacted by the opioid epidemic as one of our children nearly lost their life after an opioid overdose left them unconscious on life support for three heart wrenching days.

As a proud democrat, I have volunteered on democratic campaigns for well over a decade, from working the polls, phone banking, to engaging citizens on democratic values. I am a proud active member of the Fairfax County Democratic Committee (FCDC) and the FCDC Black Caucus. I was an active member of the Franconia District (formerly Lee District) Democratic Committee until transferring to the Mount Vernon District Committee, where I serve as Co-Chair for Community Outreach and am a member of the Social Justice Committee.

I have experience running toward challenges when others would soon run away. This is the type of diverse experience and devotion that we need to represent the Mount Vernon District now more than ever! As a father of Fairfax County Public Schools students, I share in the need to ensure that we have a public school system that adequately prepares our next generation to enter society.

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. *Safe Schools: Combating the Opioid Epidemic, Mental Health Support for Students and Breaking the School to Prison Pipeline*
 - b. *Equity & Inclusion: Celebrating Diversity & Mentorship*
 - c. *Serving Teachers: Support Collective Bargaining, Decrease Class Sizes and Competitive Compensation Packages*
 - d. *Serving Students & Families: Eliminating Lunch Debt, Expanding After School Programming, Language Instruction for ESOL Students*
 - e. *Workforce Development: Prepare our non- college bound students to enter the workforce by supporting academy programs and the Workforce Innovation Skills Hub*

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?

In addition to continued support for collective bargaining and professional development, we can start by ensuring that the teaching and administrative workforce feels valued, appreciated and supported. This begins with active listening to understand their challenges, concerns, and desired outcomes.

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 what makes us strong, and it’s something that should be celebrated. I would ensure this message of acceptance and mutual respect for all is embraced by the Mount Vernon District, and more specifically in our schools. In an effort to ensure that every FCPS student is “met by name and by need,” I will take the time to foster an open dialogue with students and families. I will be committed to actively listening to learn, understand and appreciate their diverse backgrounds.

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 am prepared to protect public education by remaining focused on the issues, and not partisan politics that distract us from accomplishing our overall mission in public education.

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 identifies 17 areas of focus to promote equity including community and economic development, housing education, environment and education. The challenges that we need to overcome to close opportunity and achievement gaps is an "All Hands On Deck" approach. Its going to take all of us to realize that we all have a vested interest to ensure that our public education system is strong and adequately prepares our children to enter society. Its great that there is a plan, however we need to ensure that we implement the plan and constantly assess its effectiveness via qualitative and quantitative data sets.

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

I want to learn more about the plan to engage and support working class families, the needs of teachers and staff, and explore opportunities for deeper community partnerships. It would be helpful to learn about the current FCPS organizational culture as it relates to leadership and workplace safety. It would also be helpful to have an open dialogue to assess and discuss FCPS strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

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?

To stay connected with the FCPS school community to ensure FCPS's governance is in line with community priorities, I would utilize social media platforms, newsletters, hybrid town hall meetings and establish virtual office hours. Above all else, I would ensure that I am present in our schools, because in order to solve problems you must be close to them.