

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 decided to run because I am seeing public education being attacked by those who think teaching accurate history and respecting students as individuals is putting politics in schools. As a person that grew up in rural Southern Virginia, I know the importance of having a high quality education and how it can open doors. I am running to make sure that all students have a chance to succeed, regardless of their background or where they live in the county.

I have over 20 over years of experience in higher education as an admissions officer at three universities. I have worked with students from all types of backgrounds, helping to prepare them for the challenges of higher education, as well as helping to prepare those who seek a different path to further themselves after graduation. This is why I am very passionate about college and career readiness. Not every student is going to go to college; however, every student needs to have a plan on how to move forward with the next phase of their lives.

I also served as an elected leader in the City of Falls Church for nearly 12 years – first on the City Council, and then on the School Board. I served two of those years as School Board Chair. During my time on the school board we renovated almost every school in the division. I lead the efforts to pass a 120 million dollar bond referendum to build the first high school in the Commonwealth designed to accommodate our LGBTQIA students by providing gender neutral facilities. The high school is also a model for environmental sustainability as it is LEED Gold certified.

As a school board member my responsibility will be to set policy for the schools and hire the superintendent. It will also be my responsibility to listen to students, faculty, staff and the community as we propose policy.

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. **College and Career Readiness:** As former school board member and higher education administrator, I believe that our public schools have a duty to provide a world-class education that prepares all students for future success, to make sure they are college or workforce ready. This will improve our children's lives by providing them the means to pursue the American dream. It will foster economic growth in our community, because good schools make for skilled

workers and more attractive communities. Finally, and most importantly, making sure all our children have a chance to make it in this community is just the right thing to do. We owe this to every single student in Fairfax County, no matter where they happen to live. This is why I am committed to improving funding for college and career readiness programs to ensure students have good choices when it comes to success in life.

- b. **Pandemic Recovery:** Serving on a school board during the pandemic, I had to make many hard decisions to keep our students and staff safe. While some students had a good experience with online learning, many did not, and we must continue the work to get students back on track, especially with math and reading. We also need to look at ways to partner with community organizations during the summer to reduce summer learning loss and continue the recovery of math and reading skills year-round.
  
- c. **Supporting our School Staff:** As a member of the Falls Church School Board, I worked to improve the pay scale for teachers to be competitive with neighboring jurisdictions. I am a strong supporter of the recently adopted school board collective bargaining agreement. With more and more administrators and teachers leaving the profession due to pay, increased workloads, and divisive politicians weaponizing fear to replace good, accurate curriculums with hateful propaganda, this challenge is more urgent than ever. Fairfax County must work to maintain its competitive edge, and we can do that by developing incentives to not only recruit new teachers but also to keep our veteran teachers who have become leaders in their school. We are a world class school system because of the world class educators.
  
- d. **Environmental Sustainability:** We must live up to commitments we've made to become a more environmentally friendly school system. I led efforts to renovate existing buildings, which took into consideration environmentally friendly practices such as solar power and LEED certification. During my time on the Falls Church School Board, I helped lead efforts to build an environmentally sustainable school that will have leave less of a carbon footprint. This school, Meridian High School, is LEED Gold certified, and a model of what a 21st century high school should look like. I will be a leading advocate for having all future FCPS construction done to that standard as I know we can do it, having seen it happen. We also must take advantage of grants for electric buses to assist with greening our bus fleet.
  
- e. **School Safety:** I will work with County leaders to come up with a plan to make sure that our schools are a safe place for our students and staff to work and learn. This would involve working with the police and the school resource officer program making sure there is a clear understanding of their responsibility. I would also push to have more counselors in school as the current caseloads are currently too large. Counselors can also serve as frontline responders to disruptive students that do not present a threat to themselves or others. I will also look into new technology that is being used by other school divisions in the region to detect weapons and prevent them from entering our schools. With the current opioid crisis we are experiencing in school I would strongly support the training of all staff on the use of Narcan. Finally I would like to explore the possible return of having nurses back in school versus health aids.

**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?**

As a board member I have worked hard to protect our teachers and staff, and will continue to do so, if elected as they are the reason why our students are receiving a world class education. To ensure that we remain one of the best places in the country to teach, first we must listen to our staff to hear the challenges that they are facing. We must also look into ways that we can reward our veteran teachers, and let them know we appreciate the work they do. We must look at how we can balance the many mandates put upon them by Richmond. We also when recruiting new teachers we have to be able to make sure that new teachers have a mentor for at least the first 6 month of employment to help ease the transition. We also must ramp up recruitment at our HBCU's and minority serving institutes to make sure that we are getting some of the best and diverse minds. During my time in Falls Church City I worked with staff to develop plans to incorporate visiting HBCU's with strong education programs that they could partner with to give student teaching opportunities which would be a pipeline of teachers for the system.

**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?"**

By first coming in and visiting and talking with teachers and staff in our title 1 schools and those on the edge of title 1 status to better understand the challenges that they face making sure they are able to provide adequate instruction for those students. I would also make efforts in those schools to find ways to engage with families as they sometime feel left out of the conversation because they may not have the means and education to speak up on behalf of their students I want to them to know that I would be a voice for them. I come from a family of working class parents who struggled to make ends meet and felt that they could not be actively involved in my sister and brother's education because they didn't have college educations.

As a gay black man, I am personally invested in ensuring our school system is a safe place to learn for people of diverse backgrounds. I have worked hard for several years to make sure that black and LGBTQIA students and staff are treated equally. While in Falls Church I led an effort to make sure that

our diversity statement included gender identity. Also during the planning process of the new high school I pushed to add gender neutral facilities so that students had options. Finally I led an effort to rename the elementary and high school Thomas Edison now Oak Street and George Mason Now Meridian because of the tragic history their names represented, involving the enslavement of blacks in the Commonwealth.

As I speak with and continue to learn from parents about this area, I am aware that there are already some helpful policies with regards to students with disabilities; however, there are some areas that need more attention. I have met with and heard the concerns from parents of students with disabilities, gifted and twice exceptional. I will work to expand opportunities for all students have the chance to excel and not be limited.

**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 meet this challenge because of my time serving in public office. When dealing with people and their children there will always be some difficult time as parents will always want what is best for their children. It is unfortunate that over the last three years that politics has found its way into education. I know that every parent is eager to be an advocate for their child, and I want to hear what they have to say. I will manage this as I always have, knowing that I need to listen to all sides of an issues before making a decision, and be willing to stand up and defend the decisions that I have made, because I will always put the students and staff of Fairfax County first.

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

FCPS does face real challenges in implementing the One Fairfax policy. A major challenge is the real issue of inequities in early childhood education throughout the county. Inequities in early childhood education present major challenges to implementing an equity policy framework. Children with a higher quality early education are more likely to succeed throughout their FCPS education than other students. Pursuing an equity policy framework is a noble and worthy goal. However, we as a county still have a ways to go to deal with some of the institutions that for too long often discriminated against students from minority communities. I look forward to working with the Fairfax County School Board and community members to find ways to address these institutional challenges.

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

I would love to learn more about school policies with regards to students' disabilities, profoundly gifted students, twice exceptional students. I also would like to get a better understanding with regards to the academies that provide career readiness programs.

**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 know that trust has been broken the last few years due to extenuating circumstances and deep politicization, especially between teachers and administration, but also between parents and the school board. I have experienced this type of situation before, and I had to work to regain that trust when I became school board chair in Falls Church. The first thing that I would do is to sit down with community and school leaders to hear and understand what they perceive as issues that are not being addressed. I developed a reputation in Falls Church as a consensus builder willing to sit down and talk with folks on all sides of an issue, regardless of if I agree or disagree with their perspective. I want teachers and administrators to know that I have their back and will always make time to hear from them. I plan to attend community meetings and take the time to talk with students as well. I am always amazed when I interact with students, as they are full of great Ideas and willing to fight for there beliefs. The trust lost must be regained and I am up for the challenge.