



Fairfax County Special Education PTA School Board Election Questionnaire

About us:

Our Mission:

Empowering and connecting families, students and educators to ensure students with disabilities develop their full potential as individuals and community members.

- Fairfax County SEPTA is a county-wide PTA that covers all special education, special needs and disabled students in Fairfax County. We are made up of parents, caregivers, educators and professionals dedicated to advocating for the needs of students with disabilities.
- Fairfax County SEPTA offers the following branches of service to our Special Needs Community: Advocacy, Community & Support, improved Access to Information, Programming, and Awards & Recognition.
- Fairfax County SEPTA is dedicated to positive collaboration with FCPS and other disability advocacy groups as we work to achieve our mission.
- Fairfax County SEPTA is a member of the Fairfax County Council of PTAs as well as the VA State PTA and National PTA

About this Questionnaire:

We thank you for completing this short survey regarding your view on ways the FCPS School Board can ensure that Special Education students in FCPS receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE).

All candidates are receiving this questionnaire on August 1, 2017. We kindly request that you submit your responses to info@FairfaxCountySEPTA.org no later than August 11, 2017. We will publish all received responses on April 18, 2017. If you decline to respond, we will note that on our website and communications. We will also be encouraging Fairfax County SEPTA membership to vote in the special election on August 29, 2017.

Karen Keys-Gamarra's Responses

1. What is your view of how the budget process should be undertaken this year in terms of transparency to stakeholder group members while various options are developed, analyzed, and selected? In light of the fact that Fairfax County has the greatest shortage of special education teachers in the Commonwealth, will there be a focused consideration of chronic teacher shortages in Special Education and will you include parent groups in this discussion?

Transparency along with fiscal responsibility are my top priorities. It is important that all stakeholder groups have an opportunity to participate in the various budget committees so that all parties can understand where the money is going and how it is being spent. I am particularly interested in developing a method by which the board can hear from staff members as well as the public with respect to the efficiency and effectiveness of each program.



With respect to the shortage of special education teachers in Fairfax County, this shortage would certainly have to be considered in the budget evaluation process. As a school board member, I would understand the importance of Special Education and the need to deliver quality education to students receiving these services.

2. Given the complexity of serving an extremely diverse population of students with disabilities who require special services, will you be an at large board member with a special concern for these needs?
 - a. As an attorney who has participated in a number of educational meetings to discuss both IEP and 504 services, I would be particularly concerned about making sure that we meet our obligations to children with disabilities.
3. What personal experiences do you have with educational accommodations, whether 504 Plans, ADA provisions or Individual Educational Plans required under IDEA? Are you familiar with the Supreme Court's Endrew F. decision? How should the school board assess its impact in terms of the amount and quality of Special Services that FCPS will provide next year?
 - a. As a guardian ad litem, I have advocated for children to receive accommodations through both the 504 and IEP procedures. The school board should evaluate its special education programs by making sure that it is providing services in the least restrictive environment. I am familiar with the Endrew F. decision where the Supreme Court determined that schools have more than a *de minimis* duty to provide education to its students with disabilities. Rather, our services must be reasonably calculated to provide grade-level education to the student with appropriate supports.
4. What else should we know about you before voting?
 - a. I consider myself to be a tireless advocate for children. I spend a great deal of my time developing solutions and resolving conflicts to benefit children and families. I am proud to be endorsed by both the Fairfax Education Association and the Fairfax Federation of Teachers—I will fight to make sure that our best educators are in place so that all students can have an equal opportunity to succeed across the county.