



At Large Candidate: Ilryong Moon

VOTER GUIDE for 2023 FAIRFAX COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD

Fairfax County Special Education PTA (SEPTA) is a 501(c)3 advocating for special education students in Fairfax County Public Schools, their families and the staff who work with them. We are a part of the Fairfax County Council of PTAs and are members of the Virginia PTA and National PTA. You can read more about us on our website: www.FairfaxCountySEPTA.org

We believe that the Fairfax County School Board is one of the most important and influential government bodies affecting the success of the students and staff for whom we advocate. It is critical that our membership and others in the community are educated about the issues that concern our students and staff and the positions that all candidates take on those issues. For this reason, we have developed a questionnaire that we are sending to all candidates.

SEPTA is a non-partisan organization. We show no preference in the dissemination of our survey and in the publication of any responses received. Thus, all candidates were sent this questionnaire on the same date, all responses were due on the same date and all responses were shared publicly at the same time.

All responses are published verbatim, as received. Each respondent's submissions are published individually on the SEPTA website via individual links to each candidate.



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Question 1:

For students with disabilities (SWD), transitioning from secondary school into post-secondary independence is an extremely complex process that requires coordination between FCPS, local and state government agencies, and a variety of other public and private entities. Some examples of transition services include job training, housing, transportation, personal-finance management, professional internships, employment training programs, and college and career guidance in secondary schools. Fairfax County has a severe shortage of accessible resources and services for disabled students, regardless of ability (including, but not limited to, intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities, and twice-exceptionality). *What are your plans for collaboration with Fairfax County government leadership and other agencies in order to streamline the transition process and prioritize funding and development of services for post-secondary students leaving the public school system, such as employment and life skills bridging opportunities, affordable housing, financial planning, and transportation?*

Response:

The Fairfax County Public Schools is already a strong partner, working with Fairfax County government and its designated Community Services Board (CSB) responsible for assisting students with disabilities and ensuring they receive services to help them live, work, and otherwise participate in our community in meaningful ways. However, there still is much work to be done.

While specific funding decisions for post-secondary transition services is the direct purview of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, the School Board can act as a strong advocate for such services and enact policies which strengthen the collaboration between our two organizations structurally to ensure the transition from K-12 to post-secondary life to be productive and to afford our students the opportunities that give them the best chance at success as global citizens.

Currently, the transition is not that easy for many of our students. Waivers are hard to come by, and the students remain on the waitlist for a long time. Some services will be better than no service for many of these students transitioning.



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Not only is the current funding level inadequate to support the staffing needed to provide transition services, but the funding cap for the service providers also inhibits our ability to give our students the services they need. The school system should also improve its IEP-driven transition services.

The Fairfax County Public Schools funds programs such as WAT (Work Awareness and Transition), STEP (Secondary Transition to Employment Program), and programs at the Pulley and Davis Centers that equip students with disabilities with skills that will assist them in transitioning to work and life after high school. We also have employment transition resource teachers who work directly with students to prepare them for post-secondary opportunities. Unfortunately, those teachers mostly work with students who are seniors and in the last stage of their time with us in the school system. To better prepare our students for the transition to post-secondary life, we need to engage with them earlier, but doing so comes down to funding and staff who are already painfully overburdened with work. Such funding will be helpful whether it is in hiring additional employment transition staff or in providing incentives to the local businesses that are willing to provide more job training and employment opportunities to our students with disabilities.

One opportunity we might want to explore is to form a working commission with members of the Community Services Board and the Fairfax County Public Schools' Special Education Career and Transition Services team to better understand ways we can improve the student experiences after graduation as they seek out meaningful work and life in Fairfax County. We may also want to include in the working commission local business community members to continue exploring how they can provide more on-site job training and post-graduation employment opportunities for our students with disabilities. That working commission can look into producing recommendations on funding and policies on making the transition easier and effective.

The quality of our programs in the Fairfax County Public Schools clearly draws companies to the region, and we are committed to ensuring our students with disabilities are fully engaged in our curriculum, our extracurricular work such as Work Based Learning, and our career and transition services – giving them



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experiences that closely align with the local economy not only here in Fairfax but globally. The Fairfax County Public Schools goes above and beyond to partner with companies in the region to afford students work based learning opportunities. We should continue encouraging our students with disabilities to attend CTE and Academy classes which specifically align with this topic because these are classes that directly map to today's economy.

Question 2:

Currently, Instructional Services (general education) has staff dedicated to ongoing curriculum development while the Department of Special Services (DSS), which houses special education, does not. Therefore, the full responsibility for developing individualized special education curriculum and resources falls to the individual teachers and schools; thus, creating inconsistency, a lack of fidelity, and a high workload for special education teachers, many of whom teach multiple grade levels in one classroom. *How would you address this staffing inequity? Would you support additional permanent funding in the budget to hire dedicated staff who specialize in the development of special education curriculum and resources?*

Response:

The answer itself lies within the question. I fully support looking at the funding levels for this type of need and believe there needs to be increased funding for staff within the Special Services to collaborate with program designers and curriculum developers in the Instructional Services. Deliverables from this type of collaboration – new curriculum and methods for delivering or augmenting instruction – will help our students with disabilities and act as a relief valve taking pressure off of classroom teachers by providing specific activities and lessons alongside the existing curriculum. I look forward to exploring this type of discussion and looking into it further to see how we can bring new services and functions online to address this need.



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Question 3:

With the implementation of the Equitable Access to Literacy Plan, FCPS has been making strides toward implementing best-practice literacy instruction that follows the Science of Reading. Thus far, efforts have been focused on elementary grade instruction, particularly K-2 in the general education environment. Unfortunately, no explicit, consistent, county-wide plans have been made to allow this programming to be accessible to SWD who are taught in self-contained settings. Additionally, no plans have been made to address students (regardless of placement in general education, special education, or advanced academics) in upper elementary and secondary school who have “missed” critical best-practice literacy instruction based on the Science of Reading. Implementation of literacy instruction in secondary schools varies wildly from school to school, and even within schools, between Cat A & Cat B placements. Further, despite funding a new elementary basal resource for literacy, FCPS still lacks appropriate Tier 3 literacy interventions for all ages. Furthermore, evidence-based intervention practices typically require daily instruction, which cannot readily be achieved with the current format of block scheduling in FCPS secondary schools. *How will you ensure that all students with disabilities, ranging from students in self-contained Cat B settings to twice-exceptional gifted students, receive evidence-based literacy instruction with fidelity and, if needed, appropriate Tier 3 interventions?*

Response:

I consider literacy as the foundation of all learning. You cannot even learn math without literacy. As an immigrant who came to the U.S. as a teenager and was an ESL student, I know how fundamental it is to acquire language skills before you do anything else.

The Fairfax County Public Schools’ literacy curriculum embraces the science of reading today. If our programs are not reaching all students who can benefit from such programs, we must look for opportunities to enhance our services so that we can address reading deficiencies at all levels and not just at the elementary level. As studies have shown for some time and according to The Reading League (an organization whose vision is to advance the awareness, understanding, and use of evidence-aligned reading instruction), we all learn to read in the same way, regardless of what age we begin the process, and can learn to read as a “skilled reader” by enabling these techniques espoused by the



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studies making up the content of these methods. It is possible that students who enter the Fairfax County Public Schools after elementary school are missing out on the assessment and identification of reading skill deficiencies. We should explore additional ways to ensure that these students are identified and receive the necessary remediation and skill building opportunities as those who may be in the elementary grades. I believe our curriculum can be applied to the upper grades as well, and if we need to invest in more curriculum at the higher grade levels, I will support the funding needed.

Question 4:

The national teacher shortage is directly impacting FCPS, particularly in special education. Based on staff feedback we've received, we have significant concerns about FCPS special education staff burnout due to many contributing factors. For instance, assigning caseloads by headcount, as is done in FCPS, rather than by IEP service hours often leads to caseload inequity, resulting in students not receiving the full services and supports they require. Additionally, some special education chairs are still carrying caseloads and instructional hours beyond their contracted job description. Also, situations such as the 2022-2023 OCR agreement (regarding Covid compensatory services) continue to add hours and hours of work and tremendous stress on special education staff; teachers and related service providers did not feel sufficiently supported nor respected by central office administration throughout the process. *What will you do to support and retain the school-based special education staff (teachers, IAs, related services clinicians, and school-based administrators) who are burning out physically and emotionally? What will you do to help attract special education professionals to FCPS given the national, long-standing special education staff shortages?*

Response:

Teacher and staff shortages are a concern facing not only the Fairfax County Public Schools but the whole nation, and these challenges are the same whether recruiting mainstream or special education staff. Four key factors affecting our ability to recruit and retain teachers are: (1) compensation package, (2) collegial support and mentoring, (3) instructional autonomy and working conditions, and (4) adequate time for personal and professional development.



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Young people out of college have many other options that are more financially attractive than becoming a teacher. While we may not be able to offer recent college graduates the top salaries, we need to enhance our overall compensation package to a more competitive level, including special provisions for new teachers who settle here in Fairfax County such as relocation expense reimbursement and hiring and retention bonuses. We must also be prepared to make necessary adjustments to the compensation package based on the changing market conditions, thus ensuring our total compensation packages stay market competitive with other school districts and the private sector. Our current approach using modest, incremental increases is not addressing the issue in its entirety and, ultimately, not a winning strategy for recruiting and retaining the best talent. We need to rethink our entire mindset about the teaching profession. If we can attain the compensation structure and other bold plans I have outlined here, we will see the best college graduates entering the world of education. Achieving this, however, requires a whole-of-government approach, and commitments by federal, state, and local governments and district school boards are needed to provide the funding for a new approach. Investing in teachers is an investment in the foundation of the nation and our future.

New teachers also need more mentorship. Providing new teachers with the support they need is critical to retaining them. Many new teachers struggle in dealing with parents or even administrators. They should be provided with access to readily available mentors either within the school building or outside. They also need more mental health support.

We should also work with the local governing body and the state government to secure more affordable workforce housing in the area. Housing is just so expensive and many of our teachers, especially young teachers, are unable to live in the area where they teach.

We can explore ways to encourage more of our students to study education and then return to us for a career in teaching. Expanding our Teach for Tomorrow program and providing more part-time and summer employment opportunities for those students willing to return to us as teachers are a good starting point.



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Meanwhile, as the teacher shortage situation is not going to change overnight, we may want to explore providing more special education instructional assistants to support the regular special education teachers in the classroom.

Question 5:

What is your experience with special education, and what will you do to fill in any gaps in your knowledge about special education/disability/accessibility issues prior to making policy decisions that impact this population?

Response:

As a former member of the Fairfax County School Board with more than 20 years of service and three terms as its chairman, I have worked on and am aware of many of the issues facing our families and students with disabilities (SWD). I have stated on multiple occasions that it is important to address the current needs of our students, their families, and our community. I supported many budgetary and policy decisions over the years to provide more support to our students receiving special education services.

Education is not static, but a fluid flow of information and issues based on the moment in time we are living in. I welcome the chance to stay in communication with our families of students with disabilities, listen to their needs, and evaluate funding opportunities to expand our program services to better meet their continuing needs. As a policy maker, it is important that I am willing to reconsider our current policies and make changes wherever needed to address our most important needs, whether that is bringing on more teachers or assistants to assist mainstream teachers in the classroom or offering new or updated services to existing students. Additionally, I want to make sure we are communicating effectively and clearly with families, so they are not feeling intimidated or confused by the myriad of solutions that are offered to our students.