



At Large Candidate: Kyle McDaniel

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:

Although the bulk of transition services are under the purview of the Board of Supervisors, the School Board has a role to play. This means that the basis for collaboration must be grounded in relationships. Having these relationships is a key driver in accomplishing intergovernmental cooperation, and as an At-Large Member of the School Board it is a top priority. I am proud to be endorsed by Chairman Jeff McKay, and the vast majority of our Supervisors, and the working relationships I have built will be put to work on behalf of this community's stakeholders.

Additionally, I have observed that a challenge to service delivery for students with disabilities is consistency. My goal will be to work with stakeholders to create consistency, not only within FCPS and across schools, but as students graduate out of the schools into the post-secondary world. The JLARC study on special education service delivery concluded that more consistency in transitions is needed especially with regards to IEPs and measuring (and achieving) goals against the IEP.



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Finally, it's critical to recognize the lack of funding for these services, which results in service delivery, especially with respect to transition services through the CSB, being severely limited.

In conclusion, the process to improve transition services is inherently messy because two separate elected Boards (and governments) are responsible for them. However, through innovation and cooperation, I am confident that I will be able to work together with my colleagues on the School Board and Board of Supervisors on behalf of families of students with disabilities.

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 short answer is yes, I would support additional staff for curriculum development. My desire would be to have this curriculum developed following the Universal Design of Learning model (UDL) which, again, helps produce consistency across our school system and helps teachers more effectively do their job. The additional staff would also relieve teachers who are currently carrying this work load, and would help in teacher recruitment and retention.



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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:

In recent years, FCPS has made strides in addressing literacy gaps by modifying instructional practices, specifically through the lens of the Science of Reading. The data coming back following this modification indicates that it is accomplishing its goal: first and second graders are performing higher than pre-pandemic levels, and there has been an increase in the number of students with disabilities meeting grade level expectations.

The key driver of this success is addressing these gaps through an equity lens following the data. Which is to say, we target resources where they are most critically needed base on all available information and facts. Although we have made progress on this, we still need to do more work. As a School Board member I will work with families of students with disabilities to monitor this situation, and insist on clear and concise data that is promptly reported.



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Finally, I will hold the Superintendent accountable for performance in closing these gaps following the Science of Reading practices across all levels.

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:

I always start my answer to questions about teacher recruitment and retention by saying that the first thing we have to do is support and respect our teachers. Unfortunately this political environment is hostile to public school teachers, and public education in general. We have to have leaders on the School Board who will make defending teachers and public education one of their main objectives. For me, this is a top priority.

More broadly, there are several actions that the School Board can and should take to assist in recruitment and retention: retention bonuses, increasing funding for the Teach for Tomorrow program, entering into fair collective bargaining agreements, increasing employee health benefits for mental healthcare, raising the top tenure pay bands, and creating a welcoming and safe work environment.



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Specifically with respect to special education staff, I will note that over 92% of the FCPS operational budget is school-based staffing. We simply cannot continue to underfund our programs.

A key take away from the July JLARC study on education funding was that every school district across the state has to hire more positions than the state funding formula, the SOQ, calls for. The state funding model is unrealistic by any measure and Richmond, especially in a Dillon Rule state that handcuffs local governments, must step up and modify this formula. This is fiscally responsible governance.

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:

I am the first person to raise my hand when I don't know something and ask questions. I have done this in my professional life, and I will do this on the School Board. Special education is a policy area that I am not as familiar with as I would like to be because I have had no direct, first-hand experience with it.

That said, I have a strong background in public policy with a focus on budget, taxation, and state and local affairs. This basis of knowledge enables me to ask the right questions. I will also lean on my colleagues that are much more experienced with these matters, and I have those relationships that I will bring with me to the School Board.

Finally, working with SEPTA and stakeholders will be a large part of my work to fill in knowledge gaps.