



## **At-Large Candidate: Sandra Davis**

# **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](http://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:**

**Connections with local business leaders are essential in bridging the gap between school services and adult independence. It is imperative that FCPS provides more stable and a more varied employment opportunities for young adults transitioning out of our school system. I would help foster relationships with local businesses like Amazon and owners of local businesses that I have met along the campaign trail. I am prepared to work with the governor to raise state funding for mental and behavioral health services for young adults 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*



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*permanent funding in the budget to hire dedicated staff who specialize in the development of special education curriculum and resources?*

### **Response:**

**I would support more central office staffing for behavior therapists and low incidence disability specialists like vision therapy, with the requirement that they spend more time in schools providing direct support to students and special ed teachers.**

### **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 support additional staff and funded professional development for direct, explicit, multi-sensory, structured literacy programs such as Orton-Gillingham. All students should receive reading instruction based on the science of reading from their very first day of school. No child should have to wait to fail before they are**



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given the tools they need to succeed. Parent engagement is essential in reading and I support clear and timely notification of parents if a child is struggling to read.

### **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:**

**Burnout is caused by staff shortages, and the way to attract and retain qualified teachers to special education is through differential pay. Special education teachers deserve to be paid for the extra hours that they work and the difficulty of the work they do; justified pride in what they do is not compensation.**



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### **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:**

**After I got my degree in psychology my first few jobs were in residential care homes with young adults with disabilities. I intend to have an open door policy with SEPTA, ASCD and local, regional and national disability organizations. FCPS needs the input of all parts of the disability community, from military families to newcomers to the United States.**