



## 2022 Local Board of Education Candidate Questionnaire

CANDIDATE: Steve Whisler

OFFICE SOUGHT: Board of Education

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*I confirm that the responses provided here are my official positions in seeking local office and I understand that CCEA intends to share my responses with members and interested parties.*

CANDIDATE SIGNATURE: 

DATE SUBMITTED: 3/7/2022

*Candidates: To be considered for a recommendation, you must indicate your response to each of the questions. Clarifications, explanations, and other information may be attached, but please be certain to clearly indicate the questions(s) to which you refer.*

*Please return your completed and signed questionnaire no later than 3/7/2022 to Nathan Curtis at [ncurtis@mseane.org](mailto:ncurtis@mseane.org) or to our office at 60 Aileron Court, Suite 6, Westminster, MD 21157*

# Education Funding

## **Background Points**

- With a critical need in closing education gaps, expanding programs and services, community schools, and improving student achievement, in 2016, lawmakers formed the Kirwan Commission to meet the challenges of a changing global economy and prepare Maryland students to be successful citizens in the 21st century.
- The Kirwan Commission's recommendations evolved into The Blueprint for Maryland's Future, which originally passed in 2020, was vetoed by Governor Hogan, and had its veto overridden in 2021. The Blueprint revises the state's school funding formula for the first time in nearly two decades. Over the next 13 years, the Blueprint calls for billions of dollars of new investment in Maryland schools--and \$218 million for Carroll County through FY 30-- that would expand career and technical education programs, community schools, and pre-k; provide more resources for students from backgrounds of poverty and students with special needs; increase educator pay; hire more educators and expand and diversify the educator pipeline; and create a new, more rigorous accountability system. These programs are designed to raise achievement and address Maryland's economic inequality with programs to target concentrated poverty.
- The Board of Education will have a significant impact on implementation of the Blueprint, including future funding and success of Carroll County schools. The Blueprint is landmark legislation, but there is a continued need for investment in Carroll County schools to see that the Blueprint is successfully implemented, and in ensuring that educator voices are heard and respected throughout implementation.

1. There is considerable room for improvement in addressing educator recruitment and retention. Class sizes have increased because of cost-cutting measures and/or due to hiring freezes and retirements. Many support personnel positions have been eliminated. And Maryland is always challenged with filling educator jobs because we import nearly half of all certificated teachers from prep programs in other states. The coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated these shortages. At the same time, the Blueprint calls for the hiring of 15,000 additional educators to provide more individualized attention to students. How will you address critical concerns with educator recruitment and retention?

I will work with our County Delegation and Commissioners to ensure Kirwan and Blueprint funds are delivered to the BoE so we can address these legally mandated requirements. With regards to recruitment, I will ensure the Superintendent has the necessary resources to recruit required staff both in and outside our county and state. As for retention, we most certainly will investigate opportunities for increased salaries as well as incentive packages, which can help off-set gaps. Finally, I hope our county

advertises the numerous benefits of teaching in our county – significant parent involvement, lower class sizes compared to surrounding jurisdictions, and a lower cost of living if they decide to relocate here.

2. Do you support or oppose Maryland's updated maintenance of effort law that requires local jurisdictions to fund the local share of all wealth-equalized formulas, instead of only the foundation formula?

Support

Oppose

Additional Comments:

As I mentioned above, we will need to work with other elected officials to see if adequate funds can be provided.

## Public Funding for Private Schools

### **Background Points**

- CCEA believes any education dollars spent outside of improving public schools makes it harder to make the progress necessary to provide a world-class education for every student.
- Non-public school funding for programs in the budget such as textbooks, technology, school construction, and vouchers reduce the state's General Fund while subsidizing the cost of private education. Data from the first few years of the BOOST program indicated that more than 70% of voucher recipients already attended and paid for private school before receiving the voucher.
- The Maryland State Department of Education requires a certificate of approval or registration for private schools; it does not accredit or license them. Private schools do not have to report or administer teacher qualifications, class sizes, adherence to College and Career Readiness Standards, student retention rates, graduation rates, demographics, or discipline or suspension policies. Without these measures, it is impossible to effectively evaluate the programs funneling public tax dollars to private schools.

3. As a Board member, are you in favor of allocating public funding to home and privately schooled students?

Support

Oppose

Additional Comments:

While I do not support diversion of public funds away from our public schools, I am in favor of providing assistance to families who choose to homeschool their children. I believe there is no harm in providing parents electronic access to curriculum guides and lessons prepared during summer sessions. Homeschool and private school parents should be able to access these resources since they pay taxes.

One of my goals as a BoE member would be work with my educator colleagues, the Superintendent, and fellow board members to discern ways we can encourage homeschool parents to re-enroll their kids in our schools, I want certified teachers helping these children and I know we can find a way to bring them back to our schools. We must work together to restore these parents' confidence that we can help their children achieve great things!

## Evaluations and Less Testing, More Learning

### Background Points

- CCEA believes that educator evaluation systems must be educator-informed, research-based, and collaboratively developed. Evaluation systems should be fair, transparent, timely, rigorous, valid, and designed to improve instruction by focusing on teaching and learning.
- Maryland law mandates that student growth is a “significant component” and “one of the multiple measures” in a teacher’s evaluation. No evaluation criterion can account for more than 35%. The law also mandates that evaluation systems must be mutually agreed upon at the local level.
- A key provision of evaluation systems is the requirement for local agreement between school boards, superintendents, and local associations. Such local development allows for the evaluation system to meet the unique needs of each district.
- CCEA believes the continued push for high-stakes student assessments undermines educator’s creativity and their ability to respond to the needs of students. Instead of high-stakes assessments, which CCEA & CASE support high-quality assessments that support student learning from a rich curriculum and with room for educator’s voices in the development of curriculum and assessment.
- Additionally, CCEA supports rigorous and relevant professional development through the continued alignment of evaluation systems.

4. Do you support or oppose local autonomy to develop evaluation systems in compliance with statute and regulation?

Support

Oppose

Additional Comments:

I do agree that local school boards should work in concert with professional educators to best discern academic achievement. I have significant problems with the way our state tests students and the significant time we devote to proctoring tests. We waste so many days each year with antiquated testing processes that are often due to technology limitations and onerous requirements to administer tests. We must work together to find a way to streamline testing and remove the immense time we waste to measure academic achievement.

5. Do you support or oppose efforts to overturn school districts mutually agreed upon, statutorily compliant evaluation models in pursuit of one-size-fits-all models developed by federal and state agencies, rather than local education agencies?

Support

Oppose

Additional Comments:

We should always retain local control.

6. Do you support or oppose efforts to provide educators with sufficient professional development to ensure that they can deliver high-quality instruction aligned with College and Career Readiness?

Support

Oppose

Additional Comments:

As an educator myself, we need to ensure fellow professionals are trained with the latest techniques and pedagogy practices. I also want to ensure we help educators learn ways to identify kids in distress and other issues that help optimize safety in our schools.

## Collective Bargaining

### Background Points

- CCEA supports efforts to protect and enhance the state's collective bargaining laws.
- Collective bargaining is the negotiation of a contract – including wages, salary scale, benefits, and working conditions – between employers and employees. The items agreed to in a ratified collective bargaining agreement apply to all employees in a bargaining unit, providing a benefit to employees and employers in not having to negotiate thousands of individual contracts.
- MSEA opposes right-to-work laws. Such laws restrict freedom of association and weaken organized labor in Maryland. The strength of organized labor is critical to protecting workers, ensuring quality, and maintaining fairness, safety, and competitive wages in the workplace.

7. Do you support or oppose public education employees' rights to bargain collectively?

Support

Oppose

Additional Comments:

I support current processes in place that allow employer groups to negotiate contracts with the BoE.

8. How familiar are you with the CCEA & CASE contract?

Familiar

Unfamiliar

Additional Comments:

I must clarify that I am somewhat familiar with the contract. Because I am not a current BoE member, I am not intimately familiar with all provisions and clauses. I will say that I have extensive experience in the corporate and non-profit world with employee – management contract negotiations. I assure you that I will always bargain in good faith to ensure we meet all stakeholders' needs – especially those of our children.

9. What changes, if any, would you like to see? And how would you honor the negotiated agreement, especially in tight fiscal times?

Unfortunately, I am not educated enough on the scope and terms of the current contract to respond to this question. I hope that all parties involved realize that there are significant constraints that may be placed on the BoE if sufficient funding is not provided by federal, state, and local authorities. I will always advocate for our school system, interface with elected officials, and find ways we can make ends meet.

In light of Kirwan and Blueprint, I am very concerned that we will have shortfalls if adequate funds are not provided by state and local governments. I will make every effort to ensure we maintain current benefits for our staff and seek ways we can effectively use every dollar we have to meet priorities.



## Continuing Impact of the Pandemic

### **Background Points**

- The pandemic has exacerbated a pre-existing, multifaceted housing crisis. Housing costs continue to rise, keeping some families out of the market entirely, while those whose incomes were slashed during the pandemic have fallen so far behind that the Census Bureau estimates 7 million households as of late June 2021 face eviction when the temporary moratorium on eviction enacted during the pandemic is lifted.
- The pandemic has also increased stresses, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), food insecurity, and digital divide issues for our students.
- The pandemic has exacerbated a pre-existing, multifaceted housing crisis. Housing costs continue to rise, keeping some families out of the market entirely, while those whose incomes were slashed during the pandemic have fallen so far behind that the National Equity Atlas estimates approximately 129,000 Maryland households, as of August 2021, are behind on rent and face possible eviction when the temporary moratorium on eviction enacted during the pandemic is lifted.

10. How will you address increased needs for mental health supports for students and educators in the wake of the pandemic?

I am thankful that Kirwan and the Blueprint initiative mandate our hiring professionals to address these needs. The pandemic has created a great deal of learning loss, stress, and perhaps even mental health issues that we must monitor and address immediately if needed. We must work together to restore a healthy, safe, and productive environment for our kids.

11. The pandemic further illuminated the immediate need for reliable, affordable access to technology for all students and educators in our state. How would you propose to eliminate the digital divide?

I have already started asking our County Delegation and current Board of Commissioners on how we can leverage Cares Act and other funding to eliminate the digital divide. We must always ensure we address tech-refresh and bandwidth needs as we migrate towards and use these resources to teach and test children. In particular, I want the entire state to transform completely the way we test our kids so that we can test all kids simultaneously at a school during a cycle ... and not waste precious days testing one or a couple grades at a time. This approach disrupts schools for at least two weeks and contributes to significant learning loss.

## Racial and Social Justice

### **Background Points**

- CCEA unequivocally believes that our diversity makes us stronger. We fundamentally believe that schools should be safe, welcoming, and nurturing learning environments for students of all backgrounds and beliefs, and places where all our students see themselves in the lessons they learn and experiences they enjoy. While students of color made up approximately 64% of the student population across the state in school year 2019-2020, our state had only 29% teachers of color, 38% principals of color, and 45% assistant principals of color. MSEA was represented on the Kirwan Commission and a vocal advocate of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future in part because of our support for training and developing high-quality teachers and education leaders, particularly those from diverse and historically underrepresented backgrounds.
- Every child, regardless of their background or zip code, deserves education justice and equitable access to opportunities, resources, and supports. We believe that the lives of our Black and Brown students matter and that all our students have a fundamental right to be educated in safe, healthy, and supportive learning communities and all our educators deserve safe, healthy, and supportive working environments.
- Maryland and U.S. history are far more diverse than is generally reflected in the content and courses currently taught in our public schools. Far too many Marylanders can progress through their formal primary and secondary education and rarely, if ever, see themselves reflected in the content they are learning or hear about themselves in the stories they read and are told. This lack of inclusivity negatively impacts not only our students' ownership of and agency in their learning, but it also adversely impacts their overall engagement in their learning and portrays a one-sided view of our history for all students. This disconnect is further exacerbated by the dearth of a more diverse field of educators in our schools and by the disproportionate (and sometime inaccurate) representations seen in society and in our culture that ultimately reinforces a sense of "otherness" for the people, communities, and cultures who have been rendered less relevant and less valuable. CCEA & CASE recognize the vital importance of honesty in education: ensuring that all students learn about historical figures who not only had a tremendous impact on the forming of our state and our nation but whose actions and sacrifices laid the foundation upon which this nation's pledge of "liberty and justice for all" must be built.
- CCEA is committed to developing critical thinking skills in our students because we know that they enable them to better understand the problems our society faces and to develop collective solutions. To that end, we are abundantly clear that truth and honesty are fundamental components of teaching and learning, as are academic integrity and professional responsibility. Our essential mission is to prepare our students for college, career, and life and to play an active role in our democracy.

12. CCEA supports honesty in education across all subject areas and in all areas of the approved curriculum. To encourage critical thinking, we believe educators should have professional autonomy and should be afforded the deference to teach the truth in their classrooms, schools, and districts.

Do you support honesty in education? Do you believe educators have professional autonomy and should be afforded the deference to teach the truth in their classrooms, schools & districts?

For example, if a Carroll County high school history teacher, keeping with the approved CCPS curriculum, taught the true local story of Townsend Cook, who was lynched in Westminster in 1885, and as a result some parents became upset because they saw the lesson's material as divisive and controversial, then would you as a BOE member, defend that teacher's right to teach students this true story as part of the curriculum?

Support

Oppose

Additional Comments:

There is absolutely nothing wrong with teaching history in its full context. In the specific example you provided, there doesn't appear to be anything controversial.

13. How will you support diversity, equity, and inclusion for all students throughout the county? What specific policies do you support whose goals are focused on providing equitable access, opportunities, resources, and supports?

I will always support efforts to ensure all students are provided the best possible education in our system. What I will resist are notions that we should lower academic standards to help the overall system look better for more people. One of the things I hated most during my teaching years was giving students a minimum 50% grade ... even if they didn't bother doing the assignment. This was a horrendous policy that encouraged non-performance and made cheaper the earnest attempts by others to do a good job.

## Community Schools

### **Background Points**

- Poverty dramatically and negatively affects the wellbeing of children, particularly in the areas of physical health, mental health, safe housing, access to technology, parental support, family planning services, nutrition, youth employment, and education. Each of these areas play a large role in whether students can learn and do well in school—making it imperative that these opportunity gaps be closed if we want to provide an equitable education in our communities. According to data collected by MSDE, 48% of Maryland public school students were enrolled for free and reduced-price meals this school year (meaning their family income level is at or below 185% of federal income poverty guidelines).
- CCEA supports the establishment of community schools, where applicable, which are designed to close these opportunity gaps by making the school a hub for essential services that students in disadvantaged communities lack.
- Community schools generally have the following four components: (1) they serve a high concentration of students in poverty; (2) they employ a full-time coordinator to lead community school-related services; (3) they conduct a needs assessment to identify key obstacles to learning and the services needed to close the opportunity gaps; and (4) they work with community partners to bring those needed services into the school building or nearby locations to make them accessible to students and community members.
- The Blueprint phases in community schools beginning in FY20, starting with 219 schools with 80% or more of their students enrolled for free and reduced-price meals. Community schools will be added, phased in according to highest levels of poverty first, until FY27, when a predicted 557—nearly one-third of all schools in the state—are projected to become community schools. That makes this one of the largest scale expansions of community schools in the nation.
- The American Rescue Plan provided additional funding to assist with the expansion of small group instruction delineated in the Blueprint. Of these funds, at least 20% must be used to address pandemic-associated learning gaps through the implementation of evidence-based interventions, such as summer learning or summer enrichment, extended day, comprehensive afterschool programs, or extended school year programs.
- CCEA supports equitable and adequate resources to provide every student with an opportunity to learn in a safe and non-disruptive environment. Establishing and funding community schools is a research-based strategy for closing opportunity gaps and building strong communities.

14. Do you support or oppose local efforts to create and support community schools in areas of concentrated poverty?

Support

Oppose

Additional Comments:

I would support these initiatives but would only be able to act if adequate funds were provided by federal, state, and local authorities.

## Parental Involvement and Public Support

### **Background Points**

- It is calculated that school age children spend 70% of their waking hours (including weekends and holidays) outside of school.
- Research shows that the most consistent predictors of children's academic achievement and social adjustment are parental involvement in schools and parental expectations of the child's academic attainment and satisfaction with their child's education at school.
- Additionally, research indicates there are three major factors that influence parental involvement in schools:
  - Parents' belief that they can impact what is important and necessary on behalf of their children school.
  - The extent to which parents believe that they can have a positive influence on their children's education; and
  - Parents' perceptions that their children and school want them to be involved.

15. As a Board member, what would you do to increase parental involvement and public support for our public schools and educators?

As a teacher, I'm very aware of the improvement of students whose parents are active and involved in their schooling. I'm encouraged to see such high participation of parents in PTA meetings here in southeast Carroll, but I don't know if other parts of the county experience the same.

I will encourage parents to coordinate directly with teachers and administrators. I do not think it is the role of the BoE to get involved in issues that could easily be resolved at the school level. I will encourage the BoE to continue offering a substantial amount of time at BoE meetings to offer their thoughts, concerns, and suggestions on how we can build a better system and keep academic standards high.

16. CCEA has had ongoing concerns about how some Board of Education members have used social media in ways we have considered divisive. What assurances would you make about how you would communicate with various stakeholders?

After the experiences I've had (and seen with others), I will probably not utilize social media to engage with parents and staff. It is far better for parents to take their concerns directly to the school and not involve (or expect resolution by) a BoE member.

## Privatization

### **Background Points**

- CCEA opposes any effort to outsource or privatize education jobs that are part of a bargaining unit. We maintain that any attempt to outsource or privatize jobs of public educators violates collective bargaining agreements because such an effort is in essence terminating or firing bargaining unit positions.
- Outsourcing and privatization efforts have threatened teacher and education support professional (ESP) jobs for years. In the last few years, Anne Arundel County has attempted to outsource teaching services for deaf and blind students, Talbot County has discussed privatizing transportation services, and Kent County has attempted to privatize custodial services. There have been multi-county efforts on the Eastern Shore to outsource the hiring of occupational therapists and physical therapists to work in the schools.
- When jobs are outsourced, quality control is diminished, and safety is compromised. Public employees are subject to background checks that private employers often do not require. After privatizing, local school boards lose control over the individuals working in schools and have little ability to provide input on job performance.
- Privatizers often use an argument of cost-savings as a means of winning contracts. The amount is often misleading because they intentionally underestimate first year operating costs. Ultimately, they reduce hours, health care coverage, or just cut jobs. All these steps lead to increase in local unemployment and less money in the community overall.

17. As a Board member, are you in favor of contracting out custodial, cafeteria, and maintenance services rather than have those services provided by Board of Education employees?

\_\_\_\_\_ Support

\_\_X\_\_ Oppose

Additional Comments:

As long as the budget permits, I do not wish to see this current initiative change.

## Virtual Learning

### Background Points

- Statewide closures due to the pandemic forced educators and schools to implement virtual learning as an alternative to traditional in-person learning. The haste with which our schools, educators, and students were required to pivot was unprecedented and without advance planning. There is no doubt that the initial roll-out of virtual learning, coupled with the uncertainty of its duration, created significant challenges for all involved.
- While we don't believe that virtual learning should ever replace in-person learning, CCEA believes that well-planned, goal-specific virtual learning options should be considered to meet the individual learning or course requirement needs of some of our students.
- While there are some things about teaching that remain the same regardless of the mode of instruction, virtual learning does require some significant revisions to instructional planning and implementation that are unique. As such, CCEA believes that if classroom teachers and instructional staff are required to operate using a virtual learning modality, they must be provided with the training, resources, and supports required to ensure that they can do so effectively. MSEA also believes that all employees for virtual instruction must be school system employees and not contracted employees.

18. Do you support CCEA's position on virtual schools?

Support

Oppose

Additional Comments:

I do support CCEA's position on the issue of virtual learning to a great extent. I do believe there may be a need to use contracted services in instances where we lack certified teachers. One example may include language services or highly technical disciplines where it is difficult to find certified teachers.

I believe there is a tremendous opportunity to use virtual learning in other areas where, at the recommendation of a teacher, we have motivated students that will cooperate with instructors. I hope the BoE and teachers work together to improve virtual learning so this tool can be used to enhance student achievement.

19. Do you support or oppose the creation of virtual schools that are independent of local school boards?



Support

Oppose

Additional Comments:

I believe that all learning funded by taxpayers and under the oversight of the BoE should not be independent of the local school board. We must ensure every taxpayer dollar that is spent is used wisely and effectively to benefit academic achievement.

20. What allowances or guardrails would you like to see implemented related to virtual learning options?

As someone who has participated in and taught online courses, it is very important that we identify students that are incapable of succeeding in this environment early. I unsuccessfully advocated for all K thru 2 and Special Needs students to receive in-person instruction during the pandemic. We could have used vacant school houses in a safe, effective manner to ensure kids in these categories didn't miss critical in-person instruction and meaningfully practice sessions with our talented teachers.

If we continue to use virtual instruction, it must be done with students that comply with teacher instructions and show progress. I'd like to see us consider a teacher-referral option where teachers can identify kids for in-person instruction when virtual learning doesn't work for them.

**Thank you for taking the time to address the questions above.**