



2022 Carroll County Commissioner Candidate Questionnaire

CANDIDATE : Tom Gordon

OFFICE SOUGHT : County Commissioner D3

CAMPAIGN ADDRESS: PO BOX 1592
Westminster MD 21158

PHONE NUMBER(S): 443-776-1750

EMAIL: tom@tomgordon.org

WEBSITE: _____

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: 1/19/2022

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 question(s) to which you refer.

Please return your completed and signed questionnaire at your earliest convenience to Nathan Curtis at 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 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 County Commissioners will have a significant impact on the implementation of the Blueprint, and the 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. Please provide your general and specific thoughts on how the county can address the unmet needs facing our schools. Detail how you would prioritize aid for education in your budget deliberations.

1. The county can address the unmet needs facing our schools by prioritizing aid in the budget debates. These can include the following priorities which are of concern. We need to look into computers for every student which is similar to other counties. Lack of access places students behind and this also would include in looking into the need of adding internet access across the county. We need to look at investing in our teachers to increase and retain them versus losing quality educators to other counties. We need to give children opportunities and a world class education for the future. We also need to look at and address the changing demographics in the county and utilize this as a positive both educationally and also economically for the future.

2. 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?

2. First and foremost regarding recruitment and retention I would like to hear directly of the needs of our educators. It is too easy for some to listen to limited reports or their own opinions, I instead want to hear from the educators who work tirelessly for the children they educate directly. I am here to listen and learn from those who are working firsthand. The best knowledge comes from those who work and live it daily. We need to provide our educators with the support they need. The evolution of the pandemic has shown it is more important than ever that we provide our students with individual attention. We need to ensure programs have the appropriate support. We need to recruit, reward, and retain the best and brightest.

3. 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:

3. I do support Maryland's updated maintenance of effort law that requires local jurisdictions to fund the local share of wealth equalized formulas.

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.
- 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 State Standards, student retention rates, graduation rates, demographics, or discipline or suspension policies. Without these measures, it is impossible to ascertain the standards to evaluate any of the funded programs funneling public tax dollars to private schools.
- Carroll County Commissioners created a \$400,000 "Educational Opportunities Fund" to enhance and enrich the educational opportunities for home- and private-schooled students. CCEA is opposed to this type of diversion of public funding with no accountability.

4. Do you support or oppose allocating public funding to home and privately schooled students?

_____ Support

 _____ Oppose

Additional Comments:

4. I oppose allocating public funding to home and privately schooled students. Sending ones child to a private institution or home schooling is a personal choice. However if funds are being allocated this takes away valuable tax dollars that can be used to improve public schools and compensation for teachers.

Collective Bargaining

Background Points

- CCEA supports efforts to protect and enhance the collective bargaining rights.
- 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.

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

☒ Support

☐ Oppose

Additional Comments:

5. I support education employees rights to collective bargaining. This gives employees a larger voice at the table and can assist in adding to the educators quality of life. This also will create consistency in policy for negotiations.

6. Would you commit, as a Commissioner, to funding collective bargaining agreements that were negotiated and ratified by the Carroll County Board of Education and its employees?

☒ Support

☐ Oppose

Additional Comments:

6. Yes, I would support collective bargaining agreements that were negotiated and ratified by the Carroll County Board of Education and its employees.

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.

7. How will your budget address increased needs for mental health supports for students and educators in the wake of the pandemic?

7. I would look to support funding of mental health, well-being programs, and wellness days. I would also look for increased resources for support personnel and wellness and health counselors for educators as well as children.

8. Safe and affordable housing is necessary for all students to be able to succeed in school. What is your position on affordable housing and how it relates to education?

8. Safe and affordable housing or workforce housing is a need in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Without this important part of the foundation of needs how can we expect a student to successfully thrive when they are constantly worrying about base needs like food insecurity, safe housing, or lack of technological access for their education.

9. 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?

9. We need to provide computers for every student and teacher. Some would be surprised that home internet access is not as broadly available as they assume it to be. This would help minimize financial constraints for learning in today's world. I would support programs which provide free and reduced internet access to those in need. I would also look into improving our internet access in the county which is a challenge in rural areas. I would look to assist students and educators to navigate the digital divide and provide support and instruction resources. I would also be interested in assisting if there is an interest for additional computer training for educators skill wise given the large need for virtual learning.

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 recognizes the vital importance of 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.

10. 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, would you as a County Commissioner, defend/support that teacher's right to teach students this true story as part of the curriculum?

☒ Support

☐ Oppose

10. I support honest in education. I support the teaching of the truth in classrooms if the information is factual and the entire subject is covered instead of one side of the topic. As someone with extensive knowledge of history professionally and personally I have no issue with teaching the local history of Townsend Cook keeping with the CCPS curriculum. I would also expect that students would be taught local history including that of the Thaddeus Stevens GAR post of New Windsor as well as well as numerous other examples of local Carroll County African American history. The story of Westminster resident Alfred Bruce who upon his death in 1898 owned 7 properties in Westminster would also be a piece of history children need to learn. Mr. Bruce was not able to either read nor write, but was a successful African American resident in real estate. He and his wife and 7 children witnessed on June 29, 1863 the Civil War skirmish known as Corbit's Charge in from of their home.

11. 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?

11. I support diversity, equity, and inclusion for all students. Growing up as a product of the CCPS system I witnessed firsthand years ago that various students were teased or harassed or bullied for a variety of reasons during my education. Everyone is entitled to a safe environment for both education and educating. I am more than willing to roll up my sleeves and support policies that allow equitable access and educational opportunities for all.

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.

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

☒ Support

☐ Oppose

Additional Comments:

12. I support community schools as they are a foundation and basis to the community. Community is significant as without them it can leave a void in a community both educationally and economically which affects the community and county as a whole. If our children in Carroll County are residing in an area are experiencing hardship and struggling in our existing infrastructure we need to address and change those struggles. Every student must be provided educational opportunities.

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's 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.

13. What would you do to increase parental involvement and public support for our public schools and educators?

13. I would increase parental involvement and public support for our schools and educators by first not having a divide with the educators, parents, or Board of Education members. Over the past 8 years there have been numerous divides whether it be the BOE and BOCC, BOE members not respecting or listening to the public or educators concerns in meetings. This needs to stop and is not productive in any fashion or manner and helps to dissuade and disengage parents and the public when they only see individuals not giving them equal respect or time. I would work to have public support and foster programs and reward collectively. This topic is an area where PTA's, PTO's and booster organizations sometimes struggle as well. In order to change that we need to first address the why regarding why they are not involved.

14. How do you plan to work with Carroll County educators if elected to the Board of Commissioners?

14. If elected I plan to work with Carroll County educators by first and foremost listening to the concerns and then addressing those concerns. I want to be a conduit of change for good that is wanted and needed, not just change for change. I also will take into account the concerns and needs without just having a predisposed opinion as some currently do. If a public servant isn't willing to listen and respect those they serve or they truly a public servant?

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.

15. Are you in favor of contracting out custodial, cafeteria, and maintenance services rather than have those services provided by Board of Education employees?

_____ Support

☒ Oppose

Additional Comments:

15. I Oppose. Safety for our students, educators, and staff to provide background checks and other policies are important and critical. We shouldn't "cost-Save" when it comes to education. Our educators and students deserve the best person possible for the position. Outsourcing is in many cases not the answer when an internal employee will have a stronger knowledge base. The challenge that many miss in regards to outsourcing is that any cost saving will be nullified due to lack of quality and or potential knowledge. This also then causes large issues in the community due to local unemployment and has a larger cost to the community as a whole.

Essay Questions

A. What are the top three things you would like to accomplish in the next four years if you are elected to the Carroll County Board of Commissioners?

A. My top three things I would like to accomplish in the next four years if elected are:

First, a fiscal review of Carroll County government—income and assets to assess strengths, weaknesses, and threats both current and future while looking for areas of overall improvement to better serve the public. Second, To support local and small businesses by ensuring the county is investing in supporting businesses and families. This will bring positive economic growth for the community overall including quality of life, education, infrastructure, and our business base. Currently, we are structured on the backs of the property owners and home owners as a significant amount of county funds are based on property taxes. We need a stronger business base in the county. Third, I want to see Carroll County school system higher in the state wide school rankings.

B. What is your view of the current local tax structure? What, if any, changes would you advocate for?

B. See answer to essay A.

Regarding the tax structure. We need to adjust our take on business and not just bring in new business, but also support existing businesses and help them grow and create more revenue and jobs in Carroll. I will vigorously support increasing the business tax base via policies that foster business expansion. We are lacking stronger usage of business opportunities ranging from hydroponic greenhouses for growth of food and jobs. We need to reach out and think outside of the box and look at opportunities that we are not proactively utilizing. Stronger revenue from tourism, also revenue from film productions in Maryland which Carroll County was part of the county decades ago. These are just some examples I would advocate for and work towards.

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