



2022 Carroll County Commissioner Candidate Questionnaire

CANDIDATE : Zachary Hands

OFFICE SOUGHT : County Commissioner, District 3

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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: Zachary Hands

DATE SUBMITTED: February 18, 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.

Staffing remains a consistent challenge in Carroll County and across the State. We must prioritize bringing on educational support professionals and attracting teachers to the County to provide students with an adequate and equitable learning experience. I will address later in the questionnaire that mental/behavioral health supports must be prioritized in the budget, as well.

Our students with disabilities have been seriously affected by the disruption in the continuity of services in the last two years and these impacts have not been fully addressed. Funding priorities must be set to ensure continued compensatory services are provided and that we have the available staff to meet the needs of students.

The Blueprint provides an historic investment from the State to local school systems that is designed to work in a sequential manner and touches nearly every facet of education policy in Maryland (from PreK to CTE pathways). We must leverage these

funds effectively. This investment will only pay off if there is buy-in from the State and from local governments/boards of education.

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?

As a start, we should encourage the county board to quickly move on the establishment of the career ladder following the regulations adopted by the State Board and PSTEB, and have a plan in place to meet the minimum salary requirements the Blueprint laid out by 2025. Carroll County should be on the forefront of enticing young educators to choose CCPS.

Carroll County should pursue partnerships with local teacher prep programs to design relationships that can act as a pipeline for future employment in Carroll County. The County should take advantage of funding and grant programs that encourage these types of arrangements, such as the Teacher Collaborative Grant Program.

The Board of Commissioners and the CC BOE should also endorse legislation at the State-level that incentivizes “Live Where You Work” programs that encourages educators and staff to live in Carroll County by assisting with affordable housing opportunities (renting and buying).

Some additional options may be offering student loan relief and programs that assist with the cost of education so students can become fully certified teachers.

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:

I am supportive of the concept but I am interested to see how the issue is fleshed out in practice in the coming years given the way the formula is written into statute.

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:

I am generally opposed to additional public funding programs for private schools.

I recognize the role that nonpublic and private schools play in the education of all of our students, but public funds should go to our public schools.

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:

I am strongly supportive of the right to collectively bargain. The ability of workers to fight for fair working standards, conditions, and wages is more crucial than ever in the current employment climate in which we operate.

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:

I would respect agreements made between the CCBOE 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?

The mental and behavioral health needs of all of our students have been profoundly impacted over the last two years and an immediate goal should be prioritizing the funding of positions that focus on mental health and safety in schools (this includes robust participation of mental health coordinators and bringing in additional counselors and psychologists). We know that student learning is significantly impacted by ongoing mental health concerns.

I will add that the budget should include funding for COVID safety protocols to mitigate any further spikes in COVID cases in our county to keep our kids and teachers safe.

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?

Housing policy is inextricably linked with education policy. Continuity of location for students is vital to their academic success. We need to comprehensively seek ways to avoid evictions for low-income families and provide affordable housing options.

When students don't have a consistent place to live it makes it hard for the school system to keep track of them and provide the services and instruction they need. We must always be conscious of this issue as we discuss education policy broadly.

Having educators that live in the communities that they work in is also very important. The proposed "Live Where You Work" incentive program could drive affordable housing for educators.

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?

The State has made significant investments in an effort to close the digital divide in the last couple of years, through the Office of Rural Broadband and with funding to school systems to invest in technology that gives our students and educators the tools they need to be successful in a modern classroom environment. However, a lot of those resources haven't reached local jurisdictions at this time

There is still more work to be done. We need to make sure we don't lose sight of this issue as we emerge from COVID-19 and think of these as one-time investments. There should be an ongoing task force or commission that keeps data and makes recommendations on the technological capabilities of the school system. I'd also recommend the establishment of a regular refresh cycle similar to how textbooks are treated. We may be at a point where we transition from hard copy textbooks to digital devices and digital materials in general. Resources must be invested there.

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

Additional Comments:

I would defend a teacher's right to teach that story as a part of an age-appropriate curriculum. We need to ensure that historically accurate and culturally relevant lessons are taught in our public schools. Parents and other stakeholders should be more effectively engaged by school systems on the content of what their children are learning, however.

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?

The pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated achievement and resource gaps. We must work diligently together to address the disproportionate impacts of policies that existed long before COVID to ensure the equitable availability of academic and postsecondary opportunities for our students.

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:

I am supportive of the community schools model and its holistic approach towards supporting our students who require the services that community schools provide. As the State continues to further establish additional schools, we must ensure that the community supports in place to bolster this model are available and of high quality. Community schools support families and communities in addition to students, and they emphasize the need to look at other factors that impact students. This includes issues like housing and behavioral/mental health.

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?

We need to make it easier for parents to weigh in on their child's education and schooling. This means extra testimony at board meetings, town halls, roundtables, additional parent-teacher conferences and more informal events that give parents opportunities to participate in the school community. This is really a board of education-led effort.

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

I will meet regularly with school administrators and association leaders, as well as conduct consistent visits of schools throughout the county to meet educators in-person.

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:

In an ideal world, I would be opposed to this concept. However, I know that finding necessary staff can be a consistent challenge and students often need services immediately. There is sometimes a need to find creative solutions, even as a temporary stopgap.

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?

1. **Ensure a smooth transition to a paid Fire/EMS service in Carroll County and to bolster public health and safety.**
2. **Explore the possibility of moving Carroll County towards charter government.**
3. **Provide the resources and support necessary for students and teachers to remain safely in the classroom.**

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

I am not in favor of altering the current local tax structure at this time. We are in a transitional period with county budgets as a result of COVID-19, and I don't think any knee-jerk reactions are in the best interest of the community right now.

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