



2024 Local Board of Education Candidate Questionnaire

CANDIDATE: Dr. Amanda Jozkowski

OFFICE SOUGHT: Carroll County Public Schools- 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: *Amanda Jozkowski* DATE SUBMITTED: 12/8/2023

Candidates: To be considered for a recommendation, you must respond to each of the questions below. 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 Dec. 8th, 2023 to Nathan Curtis at ncurtis@mseanea.org or to our office at 60 Aileron Court, Suite 6, Westminster, MD 21157.

Getting to Know You

1. Please share a brief bio for us to know you better. Be sure to include how long you've lived in Carroll County, whether you have/had kids in Carroll County Public Schools (CCPS), and other ways in which you are involved in our community.

I've been proud to call Maryland home for the past 20 years. I was drawn here by the rich educational opportunities and the vibrant community life as I pursued a graduate degree in Occupational Therapy from Towson University. Since moving to Carroll County a decade ago, I've immersed myself in this community, serving in various leadership and service roles that have enhanced my love of this area and commitment to our shared success.

With my husband Michael, a research scientist, I have three young children, two of whom currently attend Freedom District Elementary. Between the three of them, I will have a child in CCPS til 2039, so I'm invested in the school system long-term!

As an occupational therapy practitioner and professor, I specialize in understanding human development and I recognize the importance of meeting students where they are to foster learning and growth. My career focuses on supporting individuals to reach their full potential by identifying unique strengths and needs and facilitating meaningful participation in their communities. This work has helped me appreciate the diversity of backgrounds and perspectives that enhance Carroll County.

Alongside my professional pursuits, I have invested time in local service:

- Member of the CCPS Family Life Advisory Committee
- Freedom Elementary School PTA committee chair
- Founding member of the Board of Directors for Action for Kindness
- Board of Directors for Camping Unlimited for people with disabilities
- Volunteer for various community events, youth athletics teams, church activities, and Scouts BSA
- Governance role on the Free State PTA

Each of these activities has deepened my connection to Carroll County and strengthened my resolve to make a positive impact here for my family and my neighbors.

Student Supports

2. How will you address increasing needs for mental health supports for students and staff?

In response to the growing need for mental health support and in alignment with Blueprint requirements, I would propose training for all staff to recognize and respond to immediate and

ongoing mental health concerns, integrating mental health education more explicitly into the student curriculum, and establishing partnerships with local mental health professionals, mentoring programs, and after-school programs to provide counseling and support. The Behavioral Health Coordinator, in collaboration with school counselors, can assist with screening and referral to in-school or community-based services. Additionally, I intend to advocate for greater transparency and accountability in how the evolving needs of CCPS students and staff are assessed and addressed. We should be actively monitoring for behaviors that indicate a need for targeted intervention, and we must support our school-based mental health professionals in implementing a multi-tiered system of support. Creating an environment in which open conversations about staff emotions and mental health can occur, and then assuring that staff have access to supports such as coverage for time to see a counselor and opportunities for casual connection and relationship-building can help improve staff well-being and decrease stress and burnout.

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

Fostering a respectful and inclusive school culture for all students, staff, and families continues to be one of my central campaign priorities. To support diversity, equity, and inclusion, I aim to implement policies that ensure every student feels valued and included. This involves approving inclusive curricula that reflect diverse cultures and histories, providing ongoing cultural competency training for educators, and potentially expanding the role of the Equity and Inclusion Officer and related Instructional Consultants to develop an equity task force in collaboration with students, parents, and community stakeholders. Such a task force might fold in the current Education that is Multicultural (ETM) Council and other groups such as those representing Special Education and speakers of other languages to take a look at how Blueprint pillar 4 is being enacted and how outcomes are actually measured and used.

Staff Supports

4. Educators across the country have felt the pressure to help correct all of society's woes, but also run the risk of "usurping parental rights" (Examples: more elementary educators are expected to change diapers of general education students than ever before, more educators are taking physical, verbal, and emotional abuse from students on a much more regular basis, educators are increasingly afraid to speak about anything divisive for fear that they'll face discipline, etc.).

What steps (short term and long term) would you take to help support educators as their jobs become increasingly difficult to navigate?

Creating a feedback mechanism where educators can voice their concerns and suggestions without fear of retribution would help Board members in making informed decisions to support their needs. I want to listen to educators – not to hear, but to understand. And then to take these learnings and amplify them using my position as a leader and community influencer.

However, feedback cannot just be consumed – it must be converted to meaningful action in the context of the role/powers of the Board and the school system’s strategic plan. I intend to name and treat educators as the professionals they are – with degrees in pedagogy and child development – explicitly, consistently, and repeatedly in all school communications and policy decisions. I would also revisit the political neutrality policy, which I feel is an invitation to report teachers for violating a “politically neutral stance” in the classroom when instead they are simply leading an educational conversation that feels a bit uncomfortable or is in tension with someone’s personal beliefs. Schools should not prohibit thoughtful discussion to avoid controversy or viewpoints that may be unpopular, and teachers certainly should not be penalized for doing what they do so well – engaging students in critical thinking. We should be welcoming such conversations in the classroom!

Correspondingly, I will advocate for active parental involvement and responsibility in their children's educational journeys, through participation in PTA/PTOs, volunteering, service on committees, direct communication with teachers and administrators, and engagement with the Board through meetings and public comment. I have personally utilized each of these venues for participation in the school system, and I feel that these relationship-building steps help breed trust and respect among all parties and develop a culture of shared responsibility. When parents and educators can come together and communicate effectively, bridging differences in values and educational approaches is more productive and achievable.

5. Some CCPS staff go through a tremendous amount of training to be able to appropriately address (sometimes restrain) a student who may pose a physical threat to self, peers, and/or staff. What would you do, as a Board member, to ensure the safety of staff who are placed in these dangerous situations?

Continuing to provide the most up-to-date, evidence-based safety training for all staff, including proper techniques for de-escalation and restraint when necessary, is critical. Additionally, it is essential to review and update the policies on student behavior and the consequences of violent actions to ensure the safety of all. This can be accomplished by conducting a formal behavioral threat assessment and developing a management plan, identifying areas of strength and risk, and clearly delineating roles of staff in close collaboration with School Resource Officers and the Security Advisory Council. Finally, I would work to ensure that school-based

mental health professionals are available in the recommended FTE in each school, and that they are working in their designated jobs (not reassigned to cover other roles).

6. What plans do you have to address the untenable workload for staff, where expectations/responsibilities are increased but nothing is ever removed or compensated for?

The movement toward the 60/40 workload required by the Blueprint should help significantly with this concern, but it is clear that CCPS is not at a point to reach that goal in the immediate short-term. Within my authority and ability, I would work to encourage administrators to allow for more flexible workload/protected non-instructional time, continue to advocate for increasing salaries and benefits packages, and make clear that we value and care for teachers by treating them with dignity and respect, not distrusting or taking them for granted. At the same time, I also intend to use my training in implementation science to help analyze which interventions/programs/trainings are working, for whom, and under what conditions – so that we can understand which may need to be adjusted and which may need to be let go. Educators are asked to collect tremendous amounts of data, but it is often unclear what will be done with those data, if anything at all. We can use this information to make smarter decisions about what initiatives may need to be “de-implemented,” so that we can save resources and do not continue to pile on more and more new expectations.

7. Our Support Staff Professionals (CASE bargaining unit members) are underpaid and underappreciated. What would you do to ensure that our education support professionals (ESPs) receive adequate and appropriate benefits, training, safe working conditions, and a living wage?

Will you support the ESP Bill of Rights (attached)?

I have publicly endorsed the ESP Bill of Rights, wholeheartedly support it, and have actively advocated for it since its inception in 2022. It is essential to recognize and uphold the rights of Education Support Professionals, as they are integral to the success of our schools. Ensuring fair wages, benefits, and working conditions for ESPs is not just about valuing their contributions but also about enabling student success. I do want to comment briefly on the idea (discussed on the MSEA website), that ESPs are “doing more with less.” While this is certainly true, it seems to be almost a point of pride for some leaders in our county, and I don’t think that we should be celebrating the necessity to stretch already very thin resources to the breaking point. I am always in support of fiscal responsibility and efficiency, but we MUST provide the necessary resources so that ESPs can do their jobs and enjoy a quality of life that we would want for anyone – especially dedicated school employees who serve our students day in and day out.

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future

8. What do you see as the benefits of The Blueprint for CCPS students, employees, and the greater community?

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future offers numerous benefits, including enhanced educational equity, increased support for underperforming schools, and a greater focus on career and technical education. It aims to help school create a learning environment where every student can achieve their full potential. For employees, it promises improved professional development and better support systems. The wider community benefits from a well-educated populace, ready to contribute positively to society in a variety of ways.

9. What concerns or obstacles do you foresee with the implementation of The Blueprint for Maryland's Future in CCPS?

While the Blueprint offers significant benefits, its implementation will face challenges like ensuring adequate funding, adapting to the specific needs of our student population and county growth patterns, and effectively training educators to meet the new standards. There might also be resistance to change, which needs to be addressed through comprehensive community engagement and transparent communication. Transparency builds trust, and it is important to remember that as with ALL grand experiments, there will be missteps and obstacles, but also great learning. Thoughtful redirection of resources, collaboration with the community, and flexibility in timeline and approach will likely be necessary for the vision of the Blueprint to become a reality in individual school systems.

Privatization and Use of Public Monies

10. As a potential Board Member, what is your position on allocating public funding to home and privately schooled students?

I believe public funding should support public education systems. In rare cases, those seeking to participate in the public school system may not be best served by existing schools and a more appropriate, least-restrictive placement in a non-public program is necessary. Additionally, I support the participation of home-schooled and privately-schooled students in select/limited public school activities which would not otherwise be available to them, such as sports and music programs, provided that sufficient resources are available and their participation does not strain public school resources, or a reasonable fee is contributed to cover their involvement.

11. As a potential Board Member, what is your position in the contracting out of services rather than have those services provided by Board of Education employees (i.e. Speech and Language Providers, custodial, cafeteria, and maintenance work, to name a few)?

Contracting out services can be a practical solution for specialized needs, but it should not replace the value and dedication of Board of Education employees. Priority should be given to employing and training internal staff, ensuring job security, and maintaining high service standards within our schools, because students are best served by people working within the school community. When contracting is necessary due to lack of available/appropriate employees or to meet government mandates (e.g., service hours required by an IEP), it should be done transparently, ensuring quality and value for the money.

Honesty in Education

12. CCEA supports honesty in education across all subject areas and in all areas of the CCPS approved curriculum. To encourage critical thinking, we believe educators should have professional autonomy and should be afforded the deference to teach truth in their classrooms, schools, and districts. How would you ensure honesty in education? How would you support our educators in implementing the approved county curriculum, even when it may be contentious?

For example, if a CCPS Social Studies teacher, keeping with the approved CCPS curriculum, taught the true 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. How would you, as a Board of Education member, defend that teacher's rights to teach students this true story as part of the curriculum?

As a proponent of comprehensive education, I believe in presenting an honest and balanced view of history and current affairs in our curricula. This means providing students with diverse perspectives and encouraging critical thinking skills, preparing them for informed citizenship in a complex world. I would ensure that educators have the professional autonomy to teach the approved curriculum truthfully and effectively by reviewing and strengthening policies that defend job security and protect good-faith educators from harassment. In cases where the content is contentious, I would advocate for open dialogue with parents and the community to explain the educational value of such content, and to provide concerned citizens with access to factual information and learning materials so that they, too, might become better educated on the topic of concern. Supporting educators with the necessary resources and training to handle sensitive topics is also essential so that they can feel confident in providing accurate instruction, helping their students evaluate information, and navigating multiple perspectives to develop their own unique worldviews.

13. What is your position on books and other instructional materials (whether supplemental or as part of the approved curriculum) that tackle difficult, and often, divisive issues? Please know that CCEA does not condone materials that are sexually gratuitous in nature.

I have been vocal in my advocacy to the current state and local Boards regarding my support for providing students with access to diverse perspectives through supplemental reading materials, including those that address challenging and divisive issues. My stance is that educational materials should encourage critical thinking and reflect a range of viewpoints, preparing students for an informed and multifaceted understanding of the world. However, I also agree with CCEA's stance against materials that are sexually gratuitous. It's essential to maintain a balance where educational content is informative and thought-provoking but remains appropriate and respectful to the diverse values of our community. My recent observations and concerns about the handling of instructional materials in CCPS underscore the importance of transparent, fair, and educationally sound policies in the selection and reconsideration of these materials.

Rebuilding Trust and Faith in Public Education

14. What is the role of the Board of Education in rebuilding the public's trust in CCPS and, more specifically, the CCPS Board of Education? What steps might you take to do this, if elected?

Rebuilding trust in public education requires open, transparent communication and community engagement. I advocate for regular dialogue with parents, teachers, and community members to discuss and address their concerns. As I wrote above in #4, there are several current mechanisms for community members to engage with the Board. Board members should work to be as responsive as possible, committed to continuously learning, and not biased in their selective responses to constituents (I for one have never once received an email response from a Board member, but I know many who have). I would also like to revisit the idea of Town Halls, which could be more conversational and less business- or procedure-oriented than traditional Board meetings. Promoting transparency in decision-making and actively demonstrating our commitment to students' and educators' success is also key to earning trust, and being open to evolving our thinking based on new and reliable information is how we all grow.

15. CCEA has had ongoing (and increasing) concerns about how some Board of Education members have used their official non-partisan position in ways that we consider divisive. What precautions would you take to avoid potential conflicts of interest and what assurances would you make about how you would communicate with various stakeholders?

It is important to remember that disagreement is ok and good – but it's not helpful to be combative or disrespectful, or to be inflexible in our thinking. As a candidate and Board member, I intend to model

professional conduct at all times through my social media, written, and in-person engagement with the community. Differences in opinion are proven to strengthen an organization and big issues are not solved in siloes but by collaboration, thinking creatively, and building bridges. I appreciate that the Board is made of individuals with unique perspectives – it should be. However, if a Board member is explicitly aligned with a particular interest group, political party, or outside organization, especially those that do not have the success of students and the public school system at heart, they may not be free to explore new ideas and will likely serve only the interests of those groups rather than the citizenry they were elected to represent.

16. What is one thing that you would like our members to know about your candidacy that wasn't addressed in a previous question and answer?

While I am now an educator in the health professions, I was the Student Representative for the Arts to my state Board of Education in high school, and this is what first inspired me to include service on the Board in my professional/career goals. So much learning is involved in the visual and performing arts, and I will always advocate for preservation and expansion of arts programs in our schools.

In addition, I saw first-hand how the student voice can have an impact and will move to give full voting rights to the Student Representative on the Board. I am confident that a student educated in our great school system, who actively volunteers for a leadership position and dedicates many hours preparing for and taking part in the process, would do their best to make good decisions and work as part of a team with the rest of the board. Being proactive about getting involved demonstrates a level of commitment and knowledge about CCPS that not all community members share.

Giving students a say does not mean that they would have the power or authority to make dramatic changes or “run the school system,” as some have claimed. It simply means building relationships, including them in the conversation, and valuing their opinions as relevant and worthwhile.

There is strong evidence that student involvement in educational decision-making increases motivation for learning, decreases negative behaviors, and enhances academic performance. Students can help us better understand what they need, and partnering with them to solve problems promotes critical thinking, communication, and teamwork skills.

I am not afraid of giving students more of a voice, and in fact think that this would make for a stronger and more representative body. I trust that CCPS has prepared them well and I would be honored to serve alongside a student in my role as a Board member. Being willing to listen, learn from, and respond effectively to all constituents is what everyone in Carroll County should want from school system leadership.

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