

New Hanover For All Questionnaire

New Hanover County Board Candidates for November 3, 2020 Election Cycle

1(a). Briefly introduce yourself.

I am an Industrial Engineer from Virginia Tech with minors in Safety Engineering and Psychology. My husband and I moved to Wilmington 25 years ago and started our own company with a Safety Division (me) and an IT Division (him). We have two grown children, both of whom attended NHCS K-12.

I volunteer in the community in several capacities: PTA (local units, district Council, and NCPTA), Communities In Schools, Azalea Festival Youth Art and High Writing Contests, and recruiting volunteers for local races. My primary volunteer focus, though, is in NHCS. I currently serve on the Title IX Committee, Crisis Management Team, the School Health Advisory Council (SHAC), and All Hands on Deck Committee. I have served on numerous other school and community committees, including the work group that created and rolled out the Career and Technical High School SEA-Tech, the Eliminating the Achievement Gap Committee, Blue Ribbon Commission for the Prevention of Youth Violence Committee (now Voyage)'s Education Action Team, and the Wilmington Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Education Action Committee.

1(b). Tell us why you are running for New Hanover County School Board.

I am running for the Board of Education because I want to be on the team that makes New Hanover County Schools better. NHCS is better than it is showing the public, and it can be better, much better, than it is showing itself right now. I am a team builder, a collaborator, a communicator, and an innovative, outside-the-box mover and shaker, and I want to use these skills to unify the Board of Education in its approach to governing our school system. I realize that the Board of Education does not really run the entire educational show. Rather, it provides oversight, and in the case of NHCS, sorely needed oversight, on consistent compliance with policies and procedures set forth by them. It is the Board of Education's responsibility to hire a competent Superintendent and then ensure that he has what is needed to run an exemplary, world-class show. By that I

mean, delivering high quality education to all its students with high quality and appropriately trained education professionals and support and ancillary staff, in clean, safe, and well-maintained facilities and athlete venues.

I believe that I am uniquely qualified for this job because I am a demonstrated leader, a Sleeve-Roller-Upper and Do-er. I have won and earned accolades, as have the other candidates, but I am most proud of how I have put my words and ideas, in partnership with those of students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members, into action over the years. I am a Search and Re-Apply kind of girl, always looking for best practices and innovative, yet manageable strategies to bring into our classrooms and into the daily operations of the school system. I am an active substitute teacher and a passionate advocate for engaging all parents in their children's education, educating all parents on how to advocate for their children, and encouraging all parents and community members to use their time, talent, and voice to enhance and improve our schools.

I believe that all children can and want to learn and that it is incumbent upon the Board of Education to ensure that the Superintendent and his entire staff meet all children where they are and develop learning strategies and provide teaching tools and resources to efficiently, effectively, and equitably educate all of our children, without regard to race, color, gender, orientation, or socio-economic status.

John Quincy Adams said, "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, you are a leader." I want to be that leader for all the children, teachers, administrators, and other equally as important NHCS employees.

2. Do you think that it is possible to make sure all classified employees are paid a live-able wage of \$15/hr or greater? Do you see a pathway for this to happen?

I absolutely support paying fair market wages for Educational Support Personnel such as teacher assistants, child nutrition workers, custodians, bus drivers, and clerical workers. Without doing more research, I don't want to commit to an answer of reaching \$15/hr across the board as a starting salary all at once, but am

very amenable to discussing how incremental pay increases via supplements over a carefully planned period of time to reach that goal can be achieved.

Classified salaries are determined by the NC General Assembly using pay grades, so Boards of Education across the state would have to lobby their legislators for increases there. I would be willing to be vocal in that charge. Any additional increases via supplements would have to come through local sources, such as the County Commission and perhaps local endowments, but frequent and frank discussions would be needed to make that happen. I am willing to do that as well. I have looked at NHCS pay schedules and talked to NHCS employees, and it appears to me that many TAs and child nutrition workers are significantly underpaid but that bus drivers are approaching the \$15/hr starting pay and are approaching \$17/hr at 15+ years, so there is some work to be done. As a starter, I would support pursuing the “Turning TAs into Teachers” tuition reimbursement pilot program in NHCS, if we are not already using it, and exploring options to use some classified employees for multiple jobs within the school system as an opportunity to get more work hours.

3. Covid-19 has created additional challenges for public education. How do you propose NHCS balance the social, emotional and education needs of children while prioritizing public health and safety?

I am very concerned about all of these issues and think NHCS and its Board of Education are going to have to try new things *even if they are hard* to deliver the high-quality education parents expect for their children.

On the safety front, I do not believe that people should be forced to choose between their safety and their jobs. My professional industry, that of Occupational Safety and Health, gained traction when OSHA was formed so that workers would not have to make this choice. Safety should be an automatic, a given, an expectation, so we must be compelled to seriously weigh in on and evaluate all possible options for feasibility and sustainability. I do not know how public school systems across the region, state, and country are going pay for the many new layers of safety precautions that are required by the CDC and state and local Health and Human Services departments in order to reopen schools and not

dilute their already compromised budgets. I will need much more information on costs and dialogue to make any determination of opinion.

I am equally concerned about social, emotional, and education needs of children and staff. Stress is permeating the lives of adults all the way down to our youngest citizens, our children. I strongly believe we need more counselors, social work workers, psychologists, and other mental health workers, ready to provide services in real time. These folks in our school system are working hard right now, but the backlog is staggering and stress and feelings of helplessness and fear are overwhelming. Partnerships with Department of Public Health for school nurses and the Department of Health and Human Services for mental health personnel have already been established but may need to be re-vamped with increased human resources. I believe face to face appointments and visits can be accomplished for students, families and staff that need services now and for whom virtual connections are not really getting the job done. We just have to be willing to make the arrangements with necessary precautions. We should investigate utilizing our wonderful partners at Coastal Horizons via WHAT clinic professionals. If that is happening, hallelujah! Let's publicize that broadly so students and parents will know how to access their services. We need to encourage staff to tap into their EAP benefits and get the support and help they need to stay whole and to be successful in their classrooms, whatever these classrooms look like.

Access, or rather lack of access, to the technology and the internet is a huge barrier. I believe NHCS has to work more quickly to get a 1:1 student to technology match. One device per household will not suffice if there is more than child in in the house. NHCS is working diligently with local internet providers to attain hotspots for students that need them. The City of Wilmington and New Hanover County Government have also provided free Wifi hotspots around our community. Parents need get frequent reminders about how to access community hot spots, and through multiple sources. Online listings are not sufficient if the people who need the information cannot access the lists.

Teachers are very intelligent and pride themselves on how they reach their students to instill a love of learning, but they still need professional development

on how to be effective and engaging online/remote learning teachers. Parents need training on how to use the platforms on which their children are learning and receiving instruction. They need directions upfront as to what to do if these platforms crash or are not available for whatever reasons, so there is not mass confusion when it happens. Telling parents to call their school each time for directions is not a good use of teacher time.

I believe NHCS should put out a clear, unified message about all of these issues and that principals should be uniformly rolling them out to their school communities, tweaking where applicable for their specific needs and concerns.

4. Currently, Black educators are underrepresented in the classroom and administration. The Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee has recommended there be an intentional effort to recruit Black educators. What actions would you advocate for to improve equitable representation in the classroom?

When I was on the Wilmington Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Education Action Team back in the late 1990s, this was a goal. When I reached out back then to black professionals, substitute teachers, and community volunteers about how to recruit and retain black educators, they told me that Wilmington was not always very welcoming to black professionals. There was little in the way of professional and social groups for them to join, especially younger professionals, and there were not as many black-owned businesses. Fast forward 20 years and NHCS is still "working" on this goal. The opportunities are a little better, there are more black-owned businesses, and more dialogue about racial inequity.

The Board's Committee on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion has cross-representation on it and that is a start, but who then is going to put their recommendations into action? The Board is not. It needs a dedicated person with NHCS Central Office staff to manage the effort and report regularly to the Board of Education on progress. To that end, I think creating a department of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, or at the very least, creating a Supervisor or Director position, similar to what UNCW, the Wilmington Police Department, and most recently, New Hanover County Government have established, that oversees the Board Committee directives and recommendations is imperative. This person could visit HBCUs on a regular basis to talk with their professors and educational teams about needs in NHCS and attend Job Fairs with the intent to find good candidates

for NHCS full-time and teacher intern positions. Of course, this can and should also be done at any college and university, not just HBCUs. NHCS can reach out to organizations and groups like the Wilmington Chamber of Commerce's African American Business Council and Genesis Block for mentors and potential business partnerships that may lead to apprenticeships, internships, and job shadow opportunities. This effort, with purposeful education and training to black and minority business owners and other community members about lateral entry teaching opportunities, might lead to new black educators. Again, "Turning TAs into Teachers" tuition reimbursement pilot program may show our dedicated African American and minority teacher/teaching assistants that they have a path up in NHCS.

5. In 2019, NHCS recognized a problem of practice. What measures would you propose taking to address the achievement gap and discretionary discipline disparities?

Efforts to close the achievement gap are neither cookie-cutter nor cut and dry to achieve results. Multi-cultural sensitivity training along with implicit bias training can lay a foundation and provide a sturdy framework for success in the classroom. The resiliency model theory should be mindfully incorporated into classroom lessons and into day-to-day school schedules. Student interns should be encouraged to take college classes on these topics. Student interns should be required to team teach at schools where the achievement gap is evident since this is where most entry level teachers get assigned. These new teachers need strong teacher mentors to help them through this difficult phase of the new career. Better yet, NHCS could rotate veteran teachers into lower performing schools and start beginning teachers with children who have fewer Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and who are mostly ongrade level or higher and then rotate them to schools that have openings.

Teaching strategies such Action Based Learning are extremely effective for all students but especially for students who struggle. It intentionally incorporates movement into all classroom lessons to keep oxygen pumping to the brain to keep students more engaged in academics than classroom shenanigans. I have been working with a team to educate and train teachers and principals on this data-driven and time-tested teaching strategy. As a Board member, I would

encourage and pretty much insist that more strategies like this used, using direct and intentional input from teachers and other educators to find best practices.

I am familiar with and support the groundbreaking work in North Carolina of Judge J. Corpening, District Attorney Ben David, and UNCW professor and researcher Dr. Janna Robertson, among many others, on Eliminating the School-to-Prison Pipeline flow by establishing an Inter-Agency Governance Agreement on the handling school offenses. This agreement is not only good on paper, but has been helpful in bringing schools, law enforcement, justice system, DSS, and other government and community partners together to change disciplinary practices in NHCS. The effort has been slow but steady and needs constant and continued work and attention.

6. Right now we live in a period of reflection and reevaluating our practices. Historically, public schools responded to disciplinary and behavioral issues by installing SRO's as part of their school safety plan. What do you think about the role of SRO's in the school system?

I support having SRO's in the schools. They add another set of eyes and ears on school campuses and another layer of caring adult role models in our schools. Well-trained school resource officers can operate more like counselors and educators, working with students to defuse peer conflict and address issues such as drug and alcohol use as well as working with crisis hotlines in real time to intervene in potentially dangerous situations before regrettable behavior occurs. Their presence in the schools also demonstrates that law enforcement officers are more than just people who patrol our streets, highways, and communities to "catch the bad guys."

SROs should not be used at schools as disciplinarians. That task falls to teachers and school administrators.

7. There have been reports in local media that a culture of intimidation has had an impact on the relationship between administration and educators. What do you think needs to be done differently to rectify it?

Unfortunately, teachers and administrators have been dealing with this for many, many years. It just does not seem to get any better. I have used my voice as a parent to help elevate concerns of teachers so they can be heard without fear of retribution, but this is not good enough when issues that are important need to be heard in order in a timely manner to get resolution. It amazes me that educators in higher positions are not more open to feedback when they themselves probably have felt intimidated at some point in their career about speaking up and speaking out about their concerns. The school system needs an avenue like the Wilmington Police Department uses (Text-a-Tip) for employees to anonymously report their concerns. Right now, NHCS uses the Ethix 360 reporting system for bullying and sexual harassment claims. Perhaps that system can be expanded to include other issues or a similar database established.

Nothing, however, beats good old-fashioned talking around the kitchen table, so to speak. NHCS needs a solid, consistent two-way flow of information between NHCS and parents and community. I would like to see the Board of Education in partnership with the PTA Council and other Parent Support Groups host quarterly, or at least bi-annual, Town Hall gatherings for open and frank Q&A and dialogue. I would like to see the same with the Board of Education and the NHCAE and/or other NHCS Teacher groups. The Superintendent should hold these same meetings because he can easily share concerns with his Senior Staff, and they in turn with their staffs, before festering can set in. If the dialogue is frequent, and standard operating procedure, there should be little to no fear in bringing troubling issues to the forefront.

I believe in behavior observation-based management and in walking the talk, so I would be in schools, in classrooms, and in central offices to see our employees and students in action, asking questions for clarity before jumping to conclusions and making rash decisions, but more importantly for building relationships within our school and school support communities. I am hopeful that new Superintendent and his staff will do the same. If we are routinely just walking and talking and observing, people should feel less threatened and more likely to be open and genuine in their comments.

8. Most schools in NC do not have the recommended ratio of psychologists, social workers and counselors to the number of students. How do you

recommend NHCS proceed in the prioritization of mental health, social stability, and emotional resilience of our students?

As I answered earlier, I am concerned about the mental health and social and emotional needs of children and staff. Stress is permeating the lives of our children. I strongly believe we need more counselors, social work workers, psychologists, and other mental health workers in the schools, ready to provide services in real time. These folks in our school system are working hard right now, but the backlog is staggering and stress and feelings of helplessness and fear are overwhelming. Partnerships with Department of Public Health for school nurses and the Department of Health and Human Services for mental health personnel have already been established but may need to be re-vamped with increased human resources. I believe face to face appointments and visits for counseling and for going over IEPs and necessary remote learning IEP addendums can be accomplished for students that need services now and for whom virtual connections are not hitting the mark. We just have to be willing to make the arrangements with necessary safety precautions. We should investigate utilizing our wonderful partners at Coastal Horizons via WHAT clinic professionals. If that is already happening, hallelujah! Let's publicize that broadly so students and parents will know how to access their services. NHCS is working in partnership with organizations like Communities In Schools that place more caring adults in the school building to support academic achievement and success and the NHRMC Resiliency Task Force that trains NHCS employees and other community members on how resiliency and trauma-informed, family-focused systems can improve early childhood as well as academic, health, and social outcomes in our community.

Staff should be encouraged to tap into their EAP benefits and get the support and help they need to stay whole and to be successful in their classrooms, whatever these classrooms look like.

9. Do you prefer the Neighborhood School model that is currently in place or the alternate Community School model that has been proposed? Would you be in favor of bussing students to create a more diverse and inclusive learning environment?

First, let me say that I am a firm believer in public schools and support internal options of choice such magnet schools, year-round schools, non-traditional high schools, early college high schools, career and technical high schools, and specialty programs within traditional high schools.

I am neutral on charter schools (a different kind of public school) because they are not clearly and dutifully regulated and because they take money away from “pure” public schools via per state-issued annual per-pupil allotments. I wish that per-pupil allotments followed the student if they change schools but that is a state decision.

I am not in favor of vouchers for private schools.

I am not in favor of neighborhood schools if presented in the covert context that neighborhood schools = segregated schools. I am in favor of children going to the school that is closest to their home when possible, but not at the expense of overloading the school with low income families and low performing students without providing the necessary additional resources (academic as well as counseling and mental health) to adequately support their needs. In the cases where two schools are fairly equidistance from student residences, I support mixing up the populations to balance the diversity and inclusive learning as much as possible. There are ways to achieve more equity that do not require bussing. These include reducing class size, lowering student to teacher, student to counselor, and student to social worker ratios, and working in partnership with organizations like Communities In Schools that place more caring adults in the school building to support academic achievement and success and the NHRMC Resiliency Task Force that trains NHCS employees and other community members on how resiliency and trauma-informed, family-focused systems can improve early childhood as well as academic, health, and social outcomes in our community.

I believe that the Board of Education members, all NHCS employees, and all students need more education and training on implicit bias and what constitutes systemic racism. This training is under way, although I am not clear about the extent it has reached. I think the Board of Education needs to monitor the rollout

closely, making sure no one is missed, and that are systems in place for new hire training, periodic refresher training, and random behavior observation. PTAs can then present similar workshops to educate parents and the community so that all education stakeholders are reading off the same page. While education and training does not and cannot force new behavior, it provides a foundation for open conversation and personal reflection and provides opportunities for role-modelling desirable behaviors.

I would support hiring a 3rd-party consultant to lead such education and training within our schools, freeing up NHCS to continue its mission to provide high quality leadership and instruction. I believe the education and training should include some in-person instruction and dialogue to hammer home the importance of good and civil communication. This training along with subsequent goals and measurable action steps need to be included in the new Strategic Plan and incorporated into the 2020-21 and future budgets and into all schools' School Improvement Plan so that progress can be monitored. Grants can be pursued to ease the financial burden of such a vast and encompassing initiative. This training should provide, or at least suggest, common curriculum and instructional resources for teachers to use as a starting point so that well-intended but perhaps misguided lessons can be avoided.

I recently reached out to the Durham County Public Schools Foundation for more information after I heard about a fundraiser they held here in Wilmington. Very interesting discussions. I learned that the DCPSF was working in partnership with Durham County Public Schools and the Durham Association of Educators to pilot the Community School model at four of its elementary schools. It took them 2 years of hard-core talking and planning and assessing community buy-in before rolling out their pilot program. I would support intentional exploration of and more education about a Community School Model pilot in New Hanover County as an alternate educational delivery system. To that end, as a member on the newly formed NHCS All Hands on Deck Committee, whose objective is to more actively and meaningfully engage businesses and the community as volunteers and financial supporters in NHCS, I volunteered to do some preliminary investigation and report back to the team.

10. Do you believe that educators in North Carolina should have the right to public sector Collective Bargaining rights?

I have worked for companies in several different states, some that were union, some that were in throws of union organizing talks, and some that were not union, but I am not a political scientist by any means. My industry, that of Occupational Safety and Health, gained traction when OSHA was formed so that workers would not have to choose between their safety and their jobs.

Since public employees are not eligible for collective bargaining, I believe teachers should do the next best thing, and continue to band together to lobby their legislators, and not their Boards of Education with no authority over salaries, for better pay and affordable benefits and for safe and clean working conditions. I could support but not lead their efforts on this. I also believe that teachers who band together should lobby their Boards of Education not only for safe and clean work environments but also for a seat at the table where curriculum, instructional delivery methods, intrinsic benefits (intangible and tangible, e.g., incentive pay for earning a Master's Degree), mental and social health issues, and other education-related issues are discussed and decisions are made. Having a voice leads to better buy-in and, ultimately, better performance and student outcomes.

Helen Keller sums it up for me, "Alone we can do so little, but together we can do so much!"

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