

Frederick Progressives

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March 11, 2018

2018 Questionnaire for FCPS Board of Education

Dear Liz Barrett, Candidate for FCPS Board of Education:

Frederick Progressives, as a chapter of Progressive Maryland, is a grassroots community organization that acts for social and economic justice by developing civic leaders and cultivating allies in order to advance economic, racial, and environmental equity, and to change our economic system for the benefit of all people in Maryland.

Learn more at www.ProgressiveMaryland.org

Progressive Maryland supports candidates who will work to build a society and economy that works for all Marylanders, with special emphasis on traditionally marginalized groups—low and moderate income residents, people of color, women, LGBTQ+, and all oppressed and exploited people. Elections can have an enormous impact on our work to reduce inequity and to improve the lives of residents all over the state. It is our responsibility not only to advocate for residents but also to empower them to engage in the political process at every level, from member-led canvasses to trainings for our members who wish to run for office.

To be considered for Frederick Progressives & Progressive Maryland's endorsement, please return the completed questionnaire by email to FrederickProgressives@riseup.net no later than 5 P.M. on Friday, March 23, 2018. Your responses will be available to the public at www.FrederickProgressives.com

Sincerely,

Josh Cassell
Secretary - Frederick Progressives
(301) 928-0697

Liz Barrett, Board of Education Candidate – Frederick Progressives Questionnaire

1. What do you believe are the precursors for academic success?

Every child is born with potential and capacity to learn and discover. A family and a community can support these natural abilities by ensuring that every child has (1) safe and secure family attachments, (2) access to caring adults, (3) safe communities, (4) and secure housing, healthful foods, and space to play. Safe communities where the essentials for life are accessible to all, regardless of socioeconomic status, race, first-language, or other factors are crucial for every child.

Parents are the first teachers; we need programs that support parents through crisis (homelessness, addiction, violence, etc.), and we need comprehensive programs that support parents who live at or below the poverty line, parents who are learning English or who have recently immigrated, as well as programs--both in and out of the school system--for parents with children who have special education needs.

When children arrive at school and throughout their education, they need access to teachers who are qualified and compensated for the work they do. Kids need teachers, staff, counselors, and administrators who welcome and affirm them—they need adults who seek to make connections, who truly see them, appreciate them for exactly who they are, and support them.

Students need access to a curriculum that provides them challenging opportunities to develop their skills and passions with a clear balance of literature, the arts, science, math, and technology. All children need time and space to discover their interests, abilities, and passion. They need classrooms that are comfortable and not overcrowded. They need school environments that are free of bullying, harassment, and intimidation. All children need time to explore and play to take on challenges, to succeed and to fail and to try again.

2. Will you advocate for universal Pre-K in FCPS? If so, how can this best be implemented?

I have supported and continue to support the idea of universal Pre-K in FCPS. At this time, FCPS provides priority Pre-K placement to students with disabilities or students who are eligible for free and reduced meals. In the last few years, FCPS has expanded Pre-K access by adding inclusion classrooms where students with and without disabilities are combined into classrooms at select schools across the County.

We face two issues (1) funding and (2) space. The Kirwan Commission's recommendations provide our legislature with a roadmap – universal Pre-K for all, but with an initial and focus on providing Pre-K to all children from low-income families. I wholeheartedly support the Kirwan Commission's thoughtful recommendations, which include feedback from stakeholders across the state. At this moment, however, current FCPS facilities would be unable to accommodate a huge influx of Pre-K students. I believe public-private partnerships with already-accredited pre-K programs provide one solid option to ensure more students receive free access to high-quality preschool with oversight by FCPS. Additionally, we need to ensure expanded/universal Pre-K remains play-based, warm and caring, and developmentally appropriate. Moving forward, we need to be building elementary schools with additional spaces for Pre-K classrooms, which requires additional capital funding from the State.

3. What does FCPS need to do to close existing achievement gaps in its student body and what programs, strategies or initiatives would you work to implement to do so?

Poverty remains the factor that connects all of our achievement gaps. Across race, disability status, ethnicity, and first-language, the most significant driver of gaps in achievement is poverty. I have included a comprehensive response regarding poverty in #8 below. We need to make a commitment County-wide to address the root causes of poverty and mitigate its effects.

This year, I voted to enact an Equity Policy (Policy 444). Through this Policy, our Board will examine every decision through the lens of equity, working to ensure resources, both human and capital, are deployed in support of what each student needs. Indeed, students who are learning English need different resources than those who are not. Students with autism need different supports and approaches than those who do not.

Finally, I champion our work to increase diversity among our teachers and staff. I support partnerships with groups like Eliminating Achievement Gaps (EAG). In meetings regarding human resources goals, I challenge our hiring officials to develop better strategy and accountability measures for hiring professionals who match the demographic make-up of our county. I support cultural proficiency initiatives that are being deployed County-wide. I support efforts to create positive and welcoming school cultures, including the relatively new Restorative Justice programs.

4. How will you increase FCPS graduates' preparedness for higher education and/or the workforce?

I continue to support our highly-successful Dual Enrollment program, which allows high schoolers the opportunity to take college classes at their high schools, virtually, or at Frederick Community College. Through this program, we have created access to college-level curriculum for students who may not have ever considered college to be an option.

We have a long-overdue need to expand programs and space for the Career and Technology Center. Creating a clear path for this expansion is among my goals for another term as a Board of Education member.

Finally, I strongly believe that we need to create more time for instruction and pursuit of individual interests by reducing the number of hours our students spend in tests mandated by the State and Federal government. This requires advocacy, not just from our Board, but from our legislators and the community.

5. What will you do to protect and enforce Policy 443? What other measures will you spearhead to defend our kids from discrimination and make sure FCPS is a safe atmosphere in which all students can thrive?

I am incredibly proud of our Board's work to enact Policy 443. I am even more proud of the grassroots student and public advocacy that led to and impacted the Policy. Policy 443 is very likely the most progressive policy in any public school system in this country to affirm the identity and rights for students who are transgender or gender non-conforming.

As the Chair of the FCPS Policy Committee, I took the lead on writing the draft of the policy, using best practices and guidance from GLSEN and the National Center for Transgender Equality as models. I shepherded the policy through drafts in Policy Committee and then through the full Board's process, with ample opportunity for public comment and engagement. As long as I am a Member of the Board or a citizen of Frederick County, I will work to ensure Policy 443 is in effect.

Further, as the only LGBTQ person elected to office in Frederick County (to the best of my knowledge), I am committed to making FCPS happier, better, safer, and welcoming for all of our kids. I graduated from FCPS in 1994, and for some of our FCPS students, things are not much better than they were 24 years ago. Policy 443 is an important step and provides an essential message to our entire FCPS community. We need to ensure the Policy is implemented with fidelity and with enthusiasm across the system.

Policy 443 is essential not just because it lays out provisions for students to use facilities that align with gender identity or to be referred to by names or pronouns of choice, **but it changes the conversation from the notion of tolerance to the idea that all students are welcome and affirmed.**

As we move forward, our Board is in the midst of implementing Policy 444, our Equity Policy, also enacted this last year. The Equity Policy is essential in ensuring students all get what they need. Moving forward on this front helps us guarantee that all students are safe and able to thrive, regardless of individual circumstance. Policy 444 received far less attention in the County or the media, but implementing this Policy with fidelity will be essential work for the Board in the coming months and years.

6. What negative effects do you believe the existence of the 287g/ICE program of the Frederick County Sheriff's Office have on students and families in Frederick County and what actions would you take to reduce or eliminate those negative effects?

I am aware of FCPS parents, including active volunteers in FCPS schools, who have been concerned about driving to their children's events (despite the fact that they are licensed to drive) and being involved in their child's education, particularly during evening events because they are concerned about their immigration status being challenged by law enforcement.

I do not support the 287g program because immigration matters are Federal, not matters for County law enforcement.

We need to ensure that schools are always safe and welcoming for all families. We do this in a number of ways, by providing open access to community events and registering and welcoming every child who calls Frederick County home.

7. What does FCPS need to do to improve student mental/ physical health/well-being and what would you work to implement and or support that would result in better student outcomes?

I am currently leading work to increase recess for FCPS students at all levels. I believe students need more opportunities for fresh air, recreation, and non-structured play. I drafted an initial Recess Policy, and the draft is moving through Committee and should come before the full Board for a first reading very soon.

We need additional counselors at all levels. I believe deploying as many licensed clinical social workers (LCSWs) is the most effective and cost-effective approach. School psychologists are effective, but cost more money. During my first year on the Board, during one of the toughest budget years to date, I advocated for and was successful in securing four additional LCSW positions. We have continued to add additional psychologists and counselors, and this is a priority this year, too.

We also simply need smaller class sizes and more teachers. Teachers who have the opportunity to get to know each student can help identify students who are struggling, who are facing mental health issues, or who may be abused or neglected. We are working to prioritize reducing class size in our strategic plan and in budgets going forward.

Finally, we must recognize that high school and middle school students face tremendous pressures from testing and curriculum. While every student must be challenged, we need to continue to pull back on testing requirements that do not provide data that is useful in assessing student growth. Our kids need more time to learn and fewer tests that do not provide information that helps improve their academic experience. We need to reduce this stress on kids and teachers.

8. What outreach and policy solutions will you advocate for in regards to student poverty?

I believe addressing root causes and mitigating the effects of poverty is the most critical priority in Frederick County.

It is a priority that we are not addressing rapidly or robustly enough. I have written and advocated to reduce poverty's impacts on public education in Frederick County well before I was elected in 2014. While I am heartened that there are efforts to increase access to affordable housing and solid partnerships between non-profits and County government, our resources are primarily dedicated in the City of Frederick. While we do have much poverty in the City, we have substantial pockets of poverty all of Frederick County, from Thurmont to Mount Airy, from Myersville to New Market. Our HUD funding and other federal program dollars come through the City's Community Action Agency -- this is money that should be applied across the County, but it is not. I have been advocating for a different approach for quite some time.

My answer to this question includes two attachments, which I link and explain below.

1. Please see and read this linked article I researched and wrote for Envision:
<https://envisionfrederickcounty.org/addressing-our-opportunity-gap/>

2. I am also including a Letter to the Editor published in the *Frederick News Post* in my response to this question:

Barrett's focus is poverty in schools

https://www.fredericknewspost.com/news/politics_and_government/elections/barrett-s-focus-is-poverty-in-schools/article_1521adbe-d840-50e8-9562-5787fb732147.html

There have been contrasts in the local news of the last few weeks. Local leaders proudly shared a [Movoto.com](#) article listing Frederick County among the 10 best counties in the United States. Recently, too, [Livability.com](#) ranked the city of Frederick as having one of the top 10 downtowns.

Other local news had sharper edges. The Frederick News-Post reported that families lined up outside of Trinity United Methodist Church early in the morning, hours before the doors opened. Over 1,000 children received donated school supplies that day.

Families wait in other lines. Throughout the summer, Seed of Life CSA, Maryland Food Bank and volunteers have held food drops. If you have attended one of these events, you know that the food is regularly gone in minutes. Farmer Mike from Seed of Life CSA watches the clock, a bittersweet race to feed our community. At a recent distribution at Hillcrest Elementary, I was again struck by the number of parents in line, most dressed from a day at work.

Some Frederick County families face more painful waits. Our Student Homelessness Initiative Partnership (SHIP) is a new collaborator with other organizations to help families when they experience homelessness. These families spend days, sometimes weeks in motels because there is usually a wait for space at the Frederick Community Action Agency shelter, currently the only space that accommodates children.

I wouldn't be here if I didn't believe Frederick County was a fantastic place full of generous and kind people. It's where I grew up and gained a lifelong benefit from the gift of our schools and educators. Putting down roots for my family here means committing to advocacy, public service and positive change.

I have written before about the tremendous momentum on poverty and homelessness, especially as we look to two new shelters that will, for the first time, be dedicated to families. The many employees, leaders and volunteers in our social service and advocacy communities are tireless and deserve our praise and support.

Reducing poverty and ending homelessness cannot rest solely on their commitment, collaboration and hard work, however. We need a strategy to proactively mitigate our growing poverty. To create collective impact — the transformation of our shared values into goals that we will achieve in the most cost-effective manner possible — we must first take a hard look at our investments in Frederick County.

The county's budget allots over \$12 million for citizens services (child advocacy, human relations, workforce and housing services), over \$500,000 for social services and over \$8.7 million for health and substance abuse services. No one knows if that is too much or not enough or if the funds are allocated to maximize the benefits of public-private partnerships.

As we build our new charter government, we must also build a strategic and outcome-oriented budget process. While the national poverty rate remains steady, the most recent four years of Census Bureau

data show an alarming increase in Frederick County poverty, from 3.9 to 5.7 percent. For county families that are led by a woman who is single, the poverty rate jumps drastically to 24 percent. These data mirror the challenges of poverty that our children and educators face each day in our school system. Over 11,000 of our public school children are from families at or below the poverty line.

Why, as a Board of Education candidate, do I focus so much on poverty? There are two reasons. First, our community deserves the best school system, and regardless of how talented and caring our teachers are or how many iPads we buy, that is impossible when over a quarter of our students face barriers to their learning and achievement because of hunger, housing insecurity or poverty's other stressors. Second, our school system and government must be more efficient and save money by aligning budgets with measurable and strategic goals. We cannot allow our school system to bear the costs of our community's growing poverty.

We are Frederick County, so compassion and service are the wheels on our bus. But we can stop burning gas and circling the block if we use data, cost-benefit analyses and best practices to make a map and track progress. This is detailed work that extends across our county and city governments through our nonprofit sectors, and links directly to the leaders we need on our Board of Education. We have a cadre of players ready for this work. I am one of them.

Liz Barrett

is a candidate for Board of Education. She writes from Frederick.

9. What policies would you support to schools and students safer from the potential threat of active shooter situations?

The short answer: we can prevent active shooter situations by not having persons who have access to weapons designed to create mass casualties.

Absent comprehensive policy and law reforms, FCPS can continue to develop positive relationships with all students and parents. We are lucky that a parent of a CHS student brought forth his concerns about his daughter, and it was clear that he prevented a mass injury/casualty situation in our schools last year. We need more counselors for our students (see my response to #7).

I support the work of our SROs in our schools. By and large, the SROs develop solid relationships with students, and they have been an effective partner in keeping our schools safe. They are important to mitigating violence and can help engender trust between students and police officers. I do not support the idea of arming teachers or school staff. I support students who seek to speak out and advocate for solutions that keep them safe.

We also need to constantly review our training and preparedness. Every school now has a defined entry point for visitors and badge requirements. Every school has an individualized lockdown and evacuation plans with drills. We need to ensure policies and plans are followed and drills are regular. It's an unfortunate reality.

10. If Frederick Progressives /Progressive Maryland does not endorse you for this race, would that affect your willingness to work with the group in the future on important issues?

I am always happy and willing to work with anyone on shared priorities.

11. Would you be willing to support Frederick Progressives priorities by:

● cosponsoring legislation or policy?	Yes
● testify in support of legislation?	Yes
● write an op ed?	Yes
● speaking at progressive events?	Yes
● attending meetings?	Yes
● meet with our leadership group?	Yes
● give updates on shared goals?	Yes
● writing letters to endorse a labor organizing drive?	Yes

Other: