

Frederick Progressives

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March 11, 2018

2018 Questionnaire for FCPS Board of Education

Dear Jay Mason, 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

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

Having parents understand the value of their children learning from birth can be the most overwhelming precursor to academic success. Parents should read to their children at every opportunity, beginning at birth. Reading is fundamental to academic success. Also, making early childhood care affordable to low-income parents will add to the academic success of their children. There are very little substitutes to having a child in daycare at an early age. My wife and I were fortunate to be able to afford daycare for all 3 of our children. Two of them were in daycare at the same time, so it was financially overwhelming. Our children were exposed to the many benefits of early childhood daycare. One of the other precursors is a solid home life, which is difficult for many. If the child's home is not solid, then a "it takes a village" mentality would be beneficial to the child's academic success. The village can include family members, friends, parents of friends, or a mentor making an investment in the child and the child's success. From the United Way's ALICE report, we know that 33% of Frederick County's residents live in poverty, so there are many children who need to be a part of the Frederick "village." Upon entering elementary school, each educator needs to be 110% invested in making sure each and every student succeeds. Having a negative early childhood educational experience can leave a lasting impression on a child. There are so many precursors that can contribute to academic success and in many cases, it is not done by the parents alone.

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

I will advocate for universal Pre-K. I understand the value added to children after they have had the opportunity to attend a daycare center. However, in my experience as a Board member of some local non-profits and being a taxpayer, I have to be mindful of the cost of universal Pre-K. Being a good steward of taxpayer money is something I will do as a Board of Education member. If the funding is available, then I will be an advocate. With the yearly FCPS budget struggles, I am not sure the funding will be available. If there are other options, such as scholarship opportunities for parents to pay for early childhood care, then I will advocate for that as well.

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?

Having been involved with Eliminating Achievement Gaps, Inc. (EAG) since 2012 and being the President of the organization since 2014, I am invested in eliminating the achievement gap. EAG is a grass-roots community group that developed into a non-profit. EAG's mission is to provide information to students and parents that will help them successfully navigate their K-12 experience. I helped initiate a community wide Back-to-School night in 2014. The goal of that event is to provide students and parents with the opportunity to converse with Curriculum Specialists, one-on-one. That allows students and parents to better understand the curriculum they are learning in school. This event has evolved into the CommUNITY Night event to encourage all students and parents from the entire county to participate. The event has been extremely successful. FCPS has taken some good strides to eliminate the achievement gap as well. The Cultural Proficiency initiative is a good start to understand individual biases that may be unknown. When the biases are discovered, it can help some individuals better understand more students allowing them to become better educators. I would like to initiate a

mentor program in the schools, which can help many students in the achievement gap and also allow teachers to focus on the classroom. A mentor can help students stay focused on school or allow them to relieve some stress with a conversation about their problems. There are many issues that hinder students from focusing on school and a mentor can help with those issues, allowing students to earn better grades, therefore, eliminating the achievement gap. I also believe challenging a student to enroll in upper level classes could be another method to eliminate the achievement gap. I would like to identify students, who we think may be struggling and give them the opportunity to showcase their intelligence. If we allow students to stay in lower level classes, who may not belong there, we are not attempting to eliminate the achievement gap. Attempting different initiatives, challenging FCPS staff and students, and involving parents and the community are methods that might be successful in eliminating the achievement gap.

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

The last report I received was that FCPS graduates 92% of their students, so our school system is already doing well. We need to continue the framework already established and create new opportunities for prudent compromise of our bedrock beliefs that we are all created equal. All students deserve ample opportunities to succeed, such as expanding enrollment for the Career and Technology Center or exploring options to get more of these programs in our high schools. When we are devoted to our students, we invest in our community and create a better tomorrow. Music and arts are curricula that help students emotionally and cognitively. Sports emphasize collaboration and teamwork to reach the goal of winning. The opportunities lost must be reestablished. I want to motivate our students to develop a foundation that will help them graduate from college or a trade school or develop skills to enter the workforce as a positive citizen. Implementing a high school intern program that goes beyond the typical work-study program. This is an opportunity to work with a local business and will help students learn real world skills needed for life after high school.

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?

As an African-American male, I understand how discriminatory actions can cause damage to a person. I will be a voice for a fair and equal school system. I will not tolerate discrimination because we are all created equal. The best way for me to spearhead against discrimination is to be active in the schools and be a voice for a safe atmosphere.

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 would like all families to be able to exist in Frederick as a cohesive community and not live in fear. Having negative initiatives such as 287g/ICE can keep students from going to school, which will cause more problems for our society. An uneducated society is an immoral society. We want well-educated, productive citizens. Children who are here due to their parents wanted to achieve the American Dream should be able to become educated. I will work with any individual or organization to make our community a better place for all to live.

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?

A well-educated staff, who is able to identify students having difficulties physically, mentally or emotionally, will help alleviate negative student outcomes. Our schools should be staffed with sufficient counselors. One thing I have learned from my 14-year old daughter is the positive effects music can have on a child. We must find the strengths in each student and emphasize those strengths, whether it is music, arts, sports, science, technology, or cosmetology. We cannot force our children to be who want them to be. We must allow them to be who and what they want to be. Children are smart and resilient, so we must allow students to showcase their talents.

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

As a Board member and former Board member of local non-profits, I understand the necessity to educate adults in poverty situations on the programs and resources available to help. Those resources could also be utilized to educate students on the importance of financial stability and planning for the future. Students should be exposed to hard-working individuals, people that have faced addiction and bounced back, individuals that have been homeless or learn how invest/save for the purposes of retirement with savings. The best way to learn is being exposed to real-world situations or people who have lived through those situations. Frederick is full of resources, and I will advocate for many resources to utilized in our schools.

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

If we are to arm anyone in the schools, I would advocate for that person to be active police officer or military, retired officer or military or a well-trained resource officer. I will not support arming teachers. Teachers did not earn a college degree in teaching to be put in a position to defend by force or take a life in a school setting. In a confrontation with an active shooter, I want the person defending the school to be combat trained. Taking a life cannot be an easy thing to do and I am not confident a teacher would be willing to take a life, unless they have been combat-trained.

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?

No, I will work with anyone pursuing a better society for all.

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: