

Submitted by Ryan McElveen, School Board Member At-large

THE FAIRFAX COUNTY FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

2015 FCPS School Board Candidate Questionnaire

Leadership and Advocacy:

1. Will you actively and assertively advocate for the full funding of FCPS as a school board member?

I absolutely will advocate for full funding for FCPS. As a School Board member (and a financial steward of the school system), I view advocacy for funding as one of my key responsibilities.

- What actions have you taken (in any role) in the past four years to advocate privately or publicly for the funding of FCPS?

In my role as School Board State Legislative Liaison, I have served as the board's voice before our General Assembly delegation and state leaders in consistently advocating for increased education funding from the state. I have worked closely with our FCPS lobbyist and FCFT's advocates in Richmond to ensure that the school system and FCFT are on the same page with our advocacy. I have also worked behind the scenes on plans to take more aggressive action to acquire more funding from the state.

My communications with the general public through newsletters, blogs, videos and social media post have consistently emphasized the importance of increasing funding for FCPS.

- Will you advocate for a Meal's Tax for Fairfax County?

Yes. And most importantly, I will work to ensure that revenue from a Fairfax County meals tax serves as an additional funding source for our schools and does not supplant existing school funding from the county.

- Will you support local school board taxing authority?

I have voted in support of local school board taxing authority as part of our legislative program every year.

2. Do you support the statement of Dr. Garza, below? Why or why not?

**FCPS Faces Deficit of More than
\$100 Million
FCPS Excellence at Risk**

Statement from Fairfax County

Public Schools Superintendent Karen K. Garza following the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors passage of the Fairfax County Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 budget:

"Once again, we find that the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors has failed to fully fund Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS). This is extremely disheartening – We entered this budget year making a good faith effort to work collaboratively with the Board of Supervisors. We worked for nearly a year with the County Executive and the Board of Supervisors to develop a reasonable budget that met only the very minimal needs of FCPS, and in the end they did not deliver."

"Supervisors are sending a clear message that they are unconcerned about the increasing challenges of our students, our teachers, and our schools. The supervisors refused to fully fund our budget for the 2015-16 school year (FY 2016), when faced with a nominal \$7.6 million deficit...."

I support Dr. Garza's message that the continued failure of our funding bodies to fully fund FCPS is slowly and steadily eroding an excellent school system. The frustration evident in her message is well warranted. As a School Board member, I am equally frustrated, because I ran (and run again) for School Board to make our excellent system even better—not to dismantle it.

The School Board, school system staff and members of the community have worked tirelessly to educate our funding bodies that the failure to fully fund our system is driving away talented teachers and staff while making young families like mine give second thought to buying homes in the county. If underfunding continues, it will destroy our county's ability to attract businesses and jobs and thus perpetuate a vicious cycle. We must continue to work to ensure that our community and funders understand these critical stakes.

Employee Salary, Benefits, and Working Conditions:

2. What priority do you place on FCPS employee salary and compensation? What plans do you have for employee compensation, if elected?

Several years ago when I was leading a legislative program briefing for our Virginia General Assembly delegation, one of the state delegates asked me to name the board's top priority. It was an easy answer: employee salaries. But as soon as those words left my lips, the delegation and other guests questioned me: "there must be more important priorities."

The only thing that has changed since I made that statement in 2013 is that the stakes are even higher now. There remains no more important priority than ensuring that our employees—the backbone of our system—are fairly compensated.

I will continue to rank increasing employee compensation as our most critical need, continue to prioritize compensation in our budget discussions, and continue to advocate at the local, state and federal level that educators be compensated at a level that respects their work.

3. What priority do you place on FCPS employee-retirement benefits and program-funding?

Employee retirement benefits are a critical part of our employee compensation packages, and we must ensure that our employees—past and present—have a say in how we handle them.

Maintaining the quality of our educational programs—the most important part of our mission—deserves the vast majority of our attention and requires constant attention and enhancement.

4. Would you support paying our IA's based upon their educational level as well as by their years of service?

Yes. Instructional assistants are valuable members of the FCPS community and need to be respected as such.

5. Do you support the recent changes to the FCPS Non-discrimination Policy?
<http://www.fcps.edu/Directives/topicalindexNO.shtml#NEW2>

Yes. I proposed the policy change and was immensely proud to join the majority of my School Board colleagues in approving it.

Instruction:

7. Do you support the FCPS Strategic Plan? Why or why not?

Yes. Although the plan has taken a great deal of time and effort to be realized, FCPS leaders did an outstanding job incorporating the views of a wide array of stakeholders into the plan and compressing system needs into concrete, achievable goals—many of which we can meet during the next School Board term.

8. Do you think FCPS currently supports its at-risk students effectively? If not, how can we do better?

Supporting at-risk students is an area that requires constant improvement, as the needs of our students evolve constantly based on changes and pressures in society. Our system has made tremendous strides in supporting students and staff facing stress and mental health issues. Our discipline reforms have embraced restorative justice practices and now allow for enhanced in-school learning support when students make mistakes. Finally, in spite of budget constraints we also have remained steadfast in our support of needy students and those who speak other languages at home by directing budget resources to these at-risk populations.

9. Do you think FCPS is supporting early childhood education initiatives appropriately? Why or Why not? What are your recommendations?

Our Board has made expanding early childhood opportunities one of our priorities (even though it doesn't officially fall under our K-12 purview), because we know that investments in the education of students at an early age pay dividends later in their educational careers (thus saving our system money). But we are nowhere near adequately accommodating all of the students who qualify for these programs. We must continue working with the county and being creative in finding the funding and space to expand our efforts.

The greatest shame is that Virginia Preschool Initiative funding goes unspent around the state. I strongly support the continued prioritization in our legislative package of two common-sense proposals at the state level to address this:

- 1) Reduce or eliminate the required local match to be eligible for state pre-K funds; and
- 2) Increase state per pupil contributions for Virginia Preschool Initiative funding to better reflect the actual costs of providing preschool services.

Communication:

10. Do you support including our teachers in the decision-making process (from planning to implementation), regarding issues of salary, working conditions, benefits, curriculum, instruction, and assessment? How can we more effectively engage our employees in decisions that impact them and their students?

Teachers should be included in our decision-making process on every important issue. Superintendent Garza has done an excellent job ensuring that teachers are brought to the table for all major policy debates and initiatives—at both the planning and implementation stages—and she has also helped revive the joint staff-School Board-employee association meetings that are so important for raising employee concerns that might otherwise be left unaddressed.

The working conditions survey is a great feedback mechanism that allows us to measure progress over time. But as an individual board member I keep my ears to the ground, holding meetings with employees and tracking their views via feedback on social media. I hope to expand this kind of outreach in the future and encourage my colleagues to do so, as well.

Other Issues: Share ideas on any issues beyond those addressed in this questionnaire:

FCFT has been a strong partner with the School Board and school system on issues for which I have strong passion: improving school food and enhancing our sustainability efforts. I truly appreciate FCFT's efforts to engage in these areas, and together we have made great progress because of our ability to work together with a common purpose: improving the health and learning environment of our students and employees.

I look forward to continuing to champion these issues on the School Board and collaborating with FCFT to address new issues that arise in the coming years.