

# THE FAIRFAX COUNTY FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

## 2015 FCPS School Board Candidate Questionnaire

*Please respond completely to the following*

### **Leadership and Advocacy:**

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

Yes, I have and will continue to advocate for full funding of FCPS by both county and state government.

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

As Vice Chairman of the Board in FY16, and Budget Chairman in FY15 and FY17, I have publicly and privately lobbied county supervisors, state delegates and senators for more funding of education in Virginia and in Fairfax County.

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

Yes, I have publicly called for institution of the Meal's Tax in Fairfax County. I believe it should be specifically ear-marked for capital infrastructure on both county and school side. I believe that ear-marking the revenue will gain broad support from the public, who can see and experience for themselves, the consequences of underfunding our county's capital infrastructure.

- *Will you support local school board taxing authority?*

Yes, I have publicly called for local taxing authority for school boards. Today, where the Board of Supervisors has taxing authority and the School Board does not, School Board members have responsibility without authority. Anyone who believes in the accountability of elected officials to the voters should support this.

This issue is but one facet of a larger problem: Virginia Government is antiquated and in need of renovation. Fairfax County voters should be demanding fundamental change in the balance of power between Richmond and Fairfax. If we are going to continue to send Richmond 79 cents of every tax dollar collected in our county, we have a right to expect greater control of our own affairs.

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 [...]**

While Vice Chairman of the Board last spring, I reviewed and approved the superintendent's letter in advance of its publication. Because I have consistently advocated that the School Board be sensitive to the constraints faced by the Board of Supervisors, and because the FY16 budget represented the kind of restrained request they had frequently asked for, I was dismayed that the Supervisors did not use any of the tools available to them that could have closed a \$7.5M gap.

We have a courageous and transformational leader in Dr. Karen Garza. We did not bring her to Fairfax County in order to preside over the dismantling the crown jewel of the Fairfax County economy: our public schools. I'm running for re-election to the Board so that I can support Dr. Garza's efforts to continue and complete the many initiatives that will make our schools even better serve the children, parents and teachers of Fairfax County.

**Employee Salary, Benefits, and Working Conditions:**

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

So long as funding authority remains with the Board of Supervisors, we need to engage them in a conversation that leads to acceptance of the principle that fair employee compensation (in the county and the schools) is not a want, but a need. If we could reach an understanding that we set certain target ranges (e.g. compensation in the top third of WABE districts), I believe it would reduce the unproductive wrangling between boards.

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

Employees deserve a secure retirement, just as do all Fairfax County taxpayers. I think the time has come for a courageous conversation about retirement benefits. In order to convince voters to support increases in employee compensation, we need to demonstrate that we have examined - and if necessary, changed - the structure of retirement benefits in the long term.

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

It's not clear what policy issue is raised by this question. I have confidence that the superintendent and her team have, or will, adequately address these concerns. One thing to be

careful about is ensuring that changes to one area of the salary structure don't ripple through the entire system with unintended consequences.

*6. Do you support the recent changes to the FCPS Non-discrimination Policy?*

Yes, I supported them without hesitation. My comments on the matter can be found here ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L0w7SZI\\_swo&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L0w7SZI_swo&feature=youtu.be)) beginning at 2:24:00, where I delivered a point by point rebuttal to the opposition. I encourage members of FCFT and the public to view it.

**Instruction:**

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

Yes, along with Ms. Derenak Kaufax, I advocated for the creation of a strategic plan at least as early as the spring of 2013. The concern behind the call for a strategic plan was a sense that the School Board and Superintendent were reacting to events, and not sufficiently pursuing clearly articulated goals. It is my expectation that with the strategic plan, the board and the superintendent will be able to make intentional decisions about what should be deferred, and what should be accelerated, whenever new issues arise.

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

Yes, I believe FCPS is effectively addressing the needs of all students, including at-risk students. For instance, our needs-based staffing formula ensures that schools with higher percentages of at-risk students have lower class sizes. I take it as an article of faith that every employee in the system understands that every child matters, and is deserving of the same care and attention as every other student in this public school system. I have been willing to voice concerns to senior leadership if I have heard suggestions that excuses are being made.

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

To significantly narrow the achievement gap, FCPS needs greater support from parents, the community, county and state government to ensure that every child that enters kindergarten has had access to a high-quality pre-school program. Longitudinal studies of children who have attended FCPS pre-K programs demonstrate convincingly that these programs are effective in leveling the playing field in early elementary school. Unfortunately we are limited by financial and facility constraints from offering pre-K to all in need.

Providing universal access to pre-K should not be a political issue – rather, it must be a moral imperative for the community. Of all jurisdictions in the United States, Fairfax County should be able to unite around this principle and demonstrate both how and why it must be done.

**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?*

It is well understood that when employees (in any realm) have a voice in affecting the direction of an organization, its policies and working conditions, they are more aligned to the goals of the organization, are happier in their work, and perform better. I believe that Dr. Garza fully understands this, and has made visible improvements in just two years. The Caring Culture Goal Area covers the relationships between employees, supervisors, parents, and children. I expect continued improvement in this area, such as principal/teacher, assistant superintendent/principal, and School Board/leadership team.

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

By no later than July 1, 2019, I want to declare Fairfax County Public Schools to be free of high-stakes tests. As we follow the Ignite strategic plan to align around the Portrait of a Graduate, I have an expectation that we will develop authentic assessments that provide a rich and multi-dimensional picture of the work accomplished in every school in FCPS. We will be able to demonstrate to politicians in Richmond and Washington that a public school system can meet the needs of every child and still be accountable, even while eliminating about 365,000 tests administered each year to the children in this county.

**Please return to FCFT by August 21st, 2015**