

Allen Dyer, Candidate for Board of Education Responses to The Baltimore Examiner Questionnaire

From: "Tawanda Johnson" <tjohnson@baltimoreexaminer.com>

To: <aldyer@lawlab.com>

Subject: Questionnaire for School Board candidates

Date: Monday, July 10, 2006 2:07 PM

The Examiner is running a series of Howard County school board stories focusing on school-related issues.

Below are the issues, and we would appreciate your comments as a way of informing our readers of your positions.

Please supply a 30-word response. If the response is longer, we reserve the right to edit it, so all candidates have a voice on the issues.

The deadline for the responses is noon July 8 with the first story running after the filing deadline.

If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to call the Howard education reporter, Tawanda W. Johnson, at 410-878-6179 or e-mail her at tjohnson@baltimoreexaminer.com or call me at 410-878-6151 or e-mail me at tumerlik@baltimoreexaminer.com.

Thank you for your time and good luck!

Sincerely,

Therese Umerlik

Assistant managing editor for the Howard County edition of The Examiner

1). According to the National School Boards Association, school board members are charged with overseeing budgets that total millions of dollars, and must contend with issues such as student achievement, special education, technology within the schools and hiring and retaining quality teachers.

What makes you qualified to serve on the Howard County School Board?

Allen Dyer's Experience:

Public school parent.

Teen driver safety coordinator for River Hill Boosters until 2005.

27 years business experience as a lawyer and computer consultant.

Experienced education law attorney.

2). Recently released state Department of Education data shows that middle-schoolers are the most likely victims of bullying, which includes teasing and making rude or insensitive remarks. The Howard County Public School System's data shows similar findings.

Is bullying a problem in Howard County?

Howard County has a schoolyard bullying problem due, in part, to central office interventions that set a bad example. Punishment and blame aggravate bullying but bullying must never be ignored.

2a.)The county has an Anti-Bullying Task Force and has conducted seminars for its staff and students to learn more about bullying and ways to deal with it.

Have these efforts been effective?

The Task Force just completed its recommendations so until the Superintendent implements those recommendations we won't know whether the commendable efforts of the Task Force will bear fruit.

3). Closing the achievement gap between minority students and other student groups has long confronted the school board. Many minority students are encountering difficulty passing the High School Assessments, which are required by the state Department of Education to graduate from high school.

How would you bridge the achievement gap?

No single magic bullet exists but more can—and should— be done (computer access, scheduled study, etc.) to improve the AFTER SCHOOL environment for students at risk.

4). Housing costs in Howard County are very expensive, resulting in many teachers living outside the county or leaving for jobs closer to their homes in other counties.

What incentives would you provide to keep teachers in the county?

Starting teachers must receive competitive salaries so each can have more choices of where they can afford to live. But, where a teacher lives is none of the BOE's business.

5). Redistricting comes up every year and causes a lot of controversy within the Howard County school community. Parents are often upset that their children are moved away from neighborhood schools.

Do you have any alternatives to redistricting?

We should adopt a feeder system so students and their school friends can advance together through middle school and high school. New Friends – OK. Lost Friends – NOT OK.

6). Under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, teachers are required to test students to make sure they meet yearly progress goals or face actions that could result in a school takeover. This has led some to charge that too much classroom time is being spent giving students tests at the expense of learning.

How much time should a teacher spend teaching to the test?

Teachers should teach the curriculum — not the test.

6a.) According to the Howard County School System's latest annual report, all schools met ³annual yearly progress² as required by the No Child Left Behind law.

Is the test an effective measure of the county's students and teachers?

“No Child Left Behind” testing is one of many measures of how our school system is performing. All available measures should be looked at together when charting how to improve.

6b.) Part of the No Child Left Behind law also allows school districts not to report the scores of students considered ³statistically insignificant,² which could lead to a school producing a higher overall passing rate on standardized tests.

What is your opinion about this part of the law?

Howard County should report the scores of ALL RACES and not use the “statistically insignificant” loophole to leave any minority behind.

7). Howard County school officials have spent \$803,000 implementing the Chancery Student Management System, which tracks student data reports, such as attendance and grades. Parents and data entry clerks have complained about the software's accuracy and slowness. But school officials say transcripts sent out last fall to colleges and universities produced no errors. Recently, school officials decided to continue ironing out kinks in the software while allowing schools to use another software to keep track of local student report. But, they noted that the SMS would remain the official student record. They also said they're working with Chancery officials to improve the software.

Should the school system purchase new software?

SMS has high school registrars — who should be classified as full time instead of part time employees — ready to commit suicide. Chancery should pay HCPSS handsomely for testing their prototype.

8). Asian and Hispanic students are among the fastest-growing student groups within the Howard County school system. Requests for interpreters to help families understand the school system have also soared over the past years to about 6,000 during the 2004-05 school year.

How would you address some of the issues facing these students and their families who grapple with limited English-speaking skills?

The public school system should work with Howard Community College to make “English as a Second Language” classes available to any public school parent willing to attend and learn.

9). The Howard County school system's older schools are in major need of systemic renovations, however, during the capital budget process, many of them keep getting pushed to the sidelines because of a lack of funding.

How would you address this issue?

Every new school construction proposal should be bundled with at least two older school renovation proposals for bidding and approval. No Renovations = No New School.

10). The president of the Howard County Education Association released a job satisfaction survey that state that 44 percent of respondents either were harassed or witnessed harassing behavior from co-workers, administrators or parents.

How should such behavior be addressed within the school system?

Harassment of adults sets a bad example and encourages student bullying. Our public schools must provide an environment for civility — not blind obedience. Participation and Due Process are the foundations.