



Sully District: Cynthia Walsh

VOTER GUIDE for 2023 FAIRFAX COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD

Fairfax County Special Education PTA (SEPTA) is a 501(c)3 advocating for special education students in Fairfax County Public Schools, their families and the staff who work with them. We are a part of the Fairfax County Council of PTAs and are members of the Virginia PTA and National PTA. You can read more about us on our website: www.FairfaxCountySEPTA.org

We believe that the Fairfax County School Board is one of the most important and influential government bodies affecting the success of the students and staff for whom we advocate. It is critical that our membership and others in the community are educated about the issues that concern our students and staff and the positions that all candidates take on those issues. For this reason, we have developed a questionnaire that we are sending to all candidates.

SEPTA is a non-partisan organization. We show no preference in the dissemination of our survey and in the publication of any responses received. Thus, all candidates were sent this questionnaire on the same date, all responses were due on the same date and all responses were shared publicly at the same time.

All responses are published verbatim, as received. Each respondent's submissions are published individually on the SEPTA website via individual links to each candidate.



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Question 1:

For students with disabilities (SWD), transitioning from secondary school into post-secondary independence is an extremely complex process that requires coordination between FCPS, local and state government agencies, and a variety of other public and private entities. Some examples of transition services include job training, housing, transportation, personal-finance management, professional internships, employment training programs, and college and career guidance in secondary schools. Fairfax County has a severe shortage of accessible resources and services for disabled students, regardless of ability (including, but not limited to, intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities, and twice-exceptionality). *What are your plans for collaboration with Fairfax County government leadership and other agencies in order to streamline the transition process and prioritize funding and development of services for post-secondary students leaving the public school system, such as employment and life skills bridging opportunities, affordable housing, financial planning, and transportation?*

Response:

Trade schools that combine with independent living. Students can partner with resources outside of school. Career and Transition Services to help kids explore possibly career options. NOVA can expand those options to take the classes part time. The Academy at Chantilly is also a good program, but the courses might not be as popular. Kids may need to explore these in a trial basis.

Apartments or group homes where kids have roommates similar to them. Teach kids how to care for themselves with positive self care. These would have access to public transportation to allow independence. Kids will also have space to learn plumbing or electrician in an apprentice type setting with the boss as someone who can offer emotional support if needed.

The math offered can be accounting, budgeting.

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The STEP program offered at Chantilly is a good program to offer support while kids can explore new jobs. Expand that program for kids that might pass academically but need the support.

Trade schools to provide certifications in plumbing or auto mechanics can offer opportunities that pay well. These kids though may need to start part time or try different skill sets to find the ones they prefer and to do this before they are eighteen.

Kids can be organized based on what their disability is, because they may need similar services that can be shared. For example, kids with dyslexia can be in the same group.

Question 2:

Currently, Instructional Services (general education) has staff dedicated to ongoing curriculum development while the Department of Special Services (DSS), which houses special education, does not. Therefore, the full responsibility for developing individualized special education curriculum and resources falls to the individual teachers and schools; thus, creating inconsistency, a lack of fidelity, and a high workload for special education teachers, many of whom teach multiple grade levels in one classroom. *How would you address this staffing inequity? Would you support additional permanent funding in the budget to hire dedicated staff who specialize in the development of special education curriculum and resources?*

Response:

Students are mainstreamed when they need the smaller class size. This does not help that student or the other students. Many special needs students cannot learn in the chaos of a mainstreamed class.

Currently, the electives for some of these kids can be career options. if the child needs speech therapy for example, that uses up elective time. The student loses an elective. The staff further puts the elective class as mainstreamed which sets up the student to fail. these electives still need smaller classes to be successful.

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Instead of asking intrusive personal questions in those surveys, ask the students what electives they want and add them. These electives can be a ticket to a career.

The IEP is many times quite vague and in my opinion, the teachers ignore it until something bad happens. Allow the parents to volunteer and offer input in how their student learns. Tutoring for students can be shared among parents with similar issues. We cannot do blanket assessments for all students with special needs but we can collaborate with parents to share tools and tips as they see fit.

I see some schools with aides who sit around in do nothing in one school, and in other schools there are shortages of staff. Coordination between schools can fix this problem. If at any time, an aide does not have something to do, he can move to a school where there is a shortage.

Busing is also not available to use clubs to learn trades either. The busing staff does not get support to reach every school. Students spend an hour on the bus and lose class time driving around.

Question 3:

With the implementation of the Equitable Access to Literacy Plan, FCPS has been making strides toward implementing best-practice literacy instruction that follows the Science of Reading. Thus far, efforts have been focused on elementary grade instruction, particularly K-2 in the general education environment. Unfortunately, no explicit, consistent, county-wide plans have been made to allow this programming to be accessible to SWD who are taught in self-contained settings. Additionally, no plans have been made to address students (regardless of placement in general education, special education, or advanced academics) in upper elementary and secondary school who have “missed” critical best-practice literacy instruction based on the Science of Reading. Implementation of literacy instruction in secondary schools varies wildly from school to school, and even within schools, between Cat A & Cat B placements. Further, despite funding a new elementary basal resource for literacy, FCPS still lacks appropriate Tier 3 literacy interventions for all ages. Furthermore, evidence-based intervention practices typically require daily instruction, which cannot readily be achieved with the current



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format of block scheduling in FCPS secondary schools. *How will you ensure that all students with disabilities, ranging from students in self-contained Cat B settings to twice-exceptional gifted students, receive evidence-based literacy instruction with fidelity and, if needed, appropriate Tier 3 interventions?*

Response:

The literacy plan is based on race. It is not evidence based when it does not improve literacy. I reject that this evidence based when kids pass when they cannot read or write.

Equity means to let kids pass who cannot read. Assume they cannot read based on their race as well. It seems as though that's an excuse for the drop in education.

Twice exceptional kids fall through the cracks. If they are in special needs classes, the education is sub par. If they are in advanced classes they do not the attention they need. They bored because it's too easy in special education and too chaotic in advanced classes. The end result is that kids are lost and fail.

Question 4:

The national teacher shortage is directly impacting FCPS, particularly in special education. Based on staff feedback we've received, we have significant concerns about FCPS special education staff burnout due to many contributing factors. For instance, assigning caseloads by headcount, as is done in FCPS, rather than by IEP service hours often leads to caseload inequity, resulting in students not receiving the full services and supports they require. Additionally, some special education chairs are still carrying caseloads and instructional hours beyond their contracted job description. Also, situations such as the 2022-2023 OCR agreement (regarding Covid compensatory services) continue to add hours and hours of work and tremendous stress on special education staff; teachers and related service providers did not feel sufficiently supported nor respected by central office administration throughout the process. *What will you do to support and retain the school-based special education staff (teachers, IAs, related services clinicians, and school-based administrators) who are burning out physically*



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and emotionally? What will you do to help attract special education professionals to FCPS given the national, long-standing special education staff shortages?

Response:

Stop telling educators to teach porn and books with extreme violence. How can they close the gap in education this way. SEL traumatizes the students and the teachers quit. Students often understand things literally and cannot regulate emotions. This is manipulation of the students. They will fight the teacher or leave. Fight or flight to avoid the confrontation. Or they tune out of things they do not want to hear. They get labeled as ADD.

Teachers were reprimanded when they could not use their own creativity to teach in way to connect with the students.

Principals can change the atmosphere in the entire school. I see some great schools and terrible schools based on the principals. They are picked on their adherence to an agenda from a pool. Remove this pool and let them be hired based on ability.

During COVID, kids were turning off the camera and sleeping or they were not even there at all. Kids were bored and no one could see if they were paying attention. Parents in the room could see the ideology taught in the class. Sometimes, parents were not allowed in the room. COVID highlighted how the kids were taught and parents were angry. Teachers quit in disgust.

Question 5:

What is your experience with special education, and what will you do to fill in any gaps in your knowledge about special education/disability/accessibility issues prior to making policy decisions that impact this population?



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Response:

I have been helping parents to sit through an IEP meeting for years. It feels like an interrogation to the parents. Everything the kid does not learn gets blamed on race, or disability .

I may just be a parent, but my family is an example of where special education did not address the needs of my son. I will not let this continue to happen to the special needs community.

I will study the jargon and acronyms you list to understand your purposes and goals. I will also point out where these are not improving the outcome of student progress. We can do better if we include parents.