

Name: Marc Williams

2. May we publish your answers online? Yes

3. What are your top two priorities for the school board and what skills do you bring to the board to help you achieve them?

My top two priorities are to continue to:

- 1) promote policies to challenge all students academically and give them what they need to succeed
- 2) address demand for learning space driven by substantial enrollment growth

As a current member of the Board, I have a record of raising student achievement. This includes significant gains in writing at the elementary schools, honors curriculum for the middle schools, tripling the participation rate in Algebra in the 8th grade, and increasing the number of TC Williams students taking Advanced Placement courses. As Chair of the Policy Committee, I guided adoption of the modified open enrollment policy, which makes the most efficient use of space before adding on to, or building new schools. I have a track record of building consensus and working collaboratively toward a common goal – abilities critical to this important position.

My wife, Nancy, and I have lived in the North Ridge neighborhood of Alexandria for 20 years. We have three children –Jack, Ford and Bridget. Jack graduated from T.C. Williams High School earlier this year; Ford is a sophomore

at T.C. Williams; and Bridget is in sixth grade at George Washington Middle School.

There will be at least 6 new Board members next year. Because of my 4 years of service on the Board and with three children who have been or are being educated in ACPS, I have the experience, judgment, and commitment to continue to work for the benefit of all of our children.



4. What are your two top critiques of the system and how do you intend to address them?

My first critique is a lack of widespread recognition of the need for cultural competency – understanding and celebrating individual student differences. This skill by our administrators, teachers and staff will help build the deeper relationships with students that are so important to raising student achievement. ACPS has a Cultural Competency Specialist who is working with staff to build cultural competency and is going to hire an Equity and Diversity Director. I strongly support this initiative. My second critique is that a belief that every child can achieve at high levels is not sufficiently ingrained. For example, when I first joined the Board, we commissioned the Virginia Association of School Superintendents (VASS) to make recommendations of how to improve outcomes for students needing special education services. One problem identified was that there was not a sense of shared “ownership and accountability for the learning of all students”. The VASS team did an assessment of ACPS progress in 2011 and concluded that, while there were “pockets of excellence”, more progress is needed. I am committed to continuing implementation of the Inclusion

and Autism Plans, which are designed to implement the VASS recommendations to raise student achievement.

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5. Parents want to understand how Alexandria measures the success of its schools. They also want to know if they are sending their child to a good school. What measures of achievement are now being used? Are they adequate or are additional metrics needed?

Federal and State measures mandate that there be an end-of-year assessment of achievement, which, for Virginia is the Standards of Learning (SOL) testing conducted in May or June of every year. While I support accountability measures for schools, this does not provide a full picture of how schools are progressing in raising student achievement. Since I joined the Board in 2008, I have been a strong proponent of building information technology systems that will facilitate gathering of student achievement data and using that assessment data to adjust instruction in real time for individual students. For example, in the early 1990's, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools used this approach to significantly raise student achievement and other Virginia school divisions, such as Prince William, are using this approach. ACPS now has the IT infrastructure in place and is well on its way to implementing this use of assessment data. This data should be used to evaluate student progress, especially student growth. This would provide parents with a more accurate picture of the effectiveness of the school and whether it is meeting the needs of its students. For example, this past year, although Jefferson-Houston K-8 school as a whole did not meet the Federal and State benchmarks, data shows significant academic growth by students, especially in reading.



6. One of the school board's major responsibilities is overseeing and managing the superintendent. What do you believe is the right relationship between the school board and the superintendent?

The Board has established a Strategic Plan and has directed the Superintendent to implement the goals of the Strategic Plan. Raising student achievement is the top priority in the Strategic Plan. This objective approach keeps the Board, the Superintendent, and the division focused on our goals.

When I first ran for the School Board in 2008, I pledged that I would hold all of us accountable -- the Board, the Superintendent, administrators, teachers, parents and students -- once the Board makes a decision. I have done this and will continue to do so. The process of building a healthy accountability system began when the Board, Superintendent and the community created the ACPS Strategic Plan. Earlier this year, the Board won the prestigious Magna Award for its Strategic Plan from the National School Boards Association. ACPS has begun to implement the Malcolm Baldrige educational performance excellence program. This means that everyone is held accountable for student achievement. Here are two examples of how a culture of accountability is being built: first, every year, the Board adopts a set of educational goals and these goals are translated to department and school education plans and individual administrator and teacher Professional Learning Plans. Each year, Central Office, schools and individuals are evaluated based on how they perform relative to the goals set in their plans. The Board receives periodic reports from the Superintendent of how the division is progressing in meetings its goals, where Board

members have an opportunity to ask probing questions. Second, there is a motto in our schools of "This is important, you can do it, I won't give up on you". Building a healthy accountability system is hard work but once built, it will pay dividends for years to come.

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7. Superintendent Sherman stated that, “Our community and students deserve candor and a complete picture when it comes to looking at school and division performance.” On a scale of A to F, how would you grade the school administration on communication, transparency, and candor? If you give a grade less than A, what changes to improve the situation would you recommend?

I would give Dr. Sherman an “A” for candor. In fact, his candor, with the encouragement of the Board, has made many teachers, administrators, and staff in ACPS and in the community uncomfortable. I believe, however, that we cannot solve the problems that we have – especially with respect to student achievement – without having candid conversations.

For my assessment of the performance of the Board and the Superintendent on transparency and accountability, please see my response to Question 6.

With respect to communications, this is an area that has improved in the past year because the School Board has made it a priority. For example, the Jefferson-Houston community has been engaged consistently throughout the planning process for the new school and the design of the

site and building has been done with a great deal of stakeholder input, including teachers. Board members have been integral to this process. This should be the model for engagement as we move forward with other major building projects. In addition, the revamped ACPS website provides a great deal of useful information as does the Education Digest sent to all families and the community. This year, with my strong support, the Board added two student liaisons to the School Board to gain a student perspective and to open up a channel of communication with T.C. Williams High School students.

I have made presentations to PTAs and civic groups to keep them informed, and spoken with many community members. The Board can do more. The School Board has recently set a goal of broadening communication with civic groups. In addition to speaking with parents, staff, students, and residents, I recommend that the School Board consider formal surveys of these stakeholders to make sure we have the best information when making decisions.

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8. Because of big enrollment increases in recent years, Alexandria's elementary schools are bursting at the seams. But these enrollment increases appear to be limiting elementary school choice. How would you address the capacity challenges facing the schools and their effects on parental choice?

ACPS has grown by almost 25% or 2600 students since 2008. Growth is projected to continue at over 3% per year. Although the Board has adopted the modified open enrollment policy as referenced above, this will not meet

demand in the long term. For the long term, ACPS must add on to existing schools and build new schools, including high school classrooms to provide space as the students advance. Keeping class size among the lowest in the region is important. I will continue to work closely with City Council to advocate for new facilities and find innovative solutions for space.

With this much growth, actual and projected, redrawing the attendance zones is a short term solution, and based on my conversations with School Board members in neighboring jurisdictions, only serves to aggravate the public. Instead, I recommend the Board consider a modified school choice plan. The Superintendent has suggested models such as that used by White Plains, NY. I will recommend that certain principles guide the Board's work and that these principles be developed in conversation with the community. Examples of such principles are proximity – students should be able, as much as possible, to walk to school – and diversity – one of the great strengths of our school division.

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9. Because of big enrollment increases in recent years, Alexandria's elementary schools are bursting at the seams. But these enrollment increases appear to be limiting elementary school choice. How would you address the capacity challenges facing the schools and their effects on parental choice?

This is a duplicate question. See my response above.

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10. Superintendent Sherman said in October 2011 that

“eliminating academic achievement differences among race, income, disability and language subgroups must be the highest priority.” This, he said, is “an educational and moral imperative.” Schools across America are struggling to close this achievement gap. Do you believe that Alexandria has been making progress in closing its achievement gaps? If so, what are the best examples? Where and in what areas do we need to do more?

It has been a privilege to serve on the School Board these last 4 years where I have made raising student achievement a top priority. As part of the Board, and as noted above, I have expanded pre-school; substantially improved elementary school writing; rolled out an ACPS curriculum, including honors curriculum for middle school; increased the number of students taking Algebra in the eighth grade from 17% in 2008 to nearly 60% today; and transformed T.C. Williams High School to a school where more students took AP courses this year than at any time in its history. There are other examples of raising student achievement. For the first time in many years, T. C. Williams achieved full accreditation this year, increased the on-time graduation rate and reduced the drop out rate. Cora Kelly STEM School, a high poverty school, which achieved a 98% SOL math pass rate last year and a 98% SOL reading pass rate this year.

More work needs to be done to raise achievement for students who receive special education services and for our ELL students.

11. One of the board's major responsibilities is budgeting. How do you restrain costs and still provide what students need?

I have worked with the Superintendent and my fellow Board colleagues to ensure that that we have responsible budgets that meet the needs of the students while being respectful of taxpayers.

Since my election in 2008, the Board has moved spending away from Central Administration and toward directly supporting classroom instruction and has adopted a modified open enrollment policy to make the most efficient use of space before adding on to, or building new schools. Also, during the last four years, per pupil spending has been reduced by 12%.

While program evaluation is ongoing, every year during the budget process, the Board and the Superintendent evaluate programs and their effectiveness for achieving the Board's Strategic Plan goals, especially with respect to raising student achievement. Because of the Board's responsibility to be a good fiscal steward, difficult choices must be made. This often involves difficult choices. One example is extended learning, which is needed throughout the division to address summer learning loss and support through the school year. Instead of increasing funding, I supported reallocating funding away from summer school and intercession at the modified calendar schools (although, three weeks are still fully funded). This reallocation provided extended learning for students in need throughout the division.

Savings may be achievable in the operating budget with respect to leases that will expire this year for office space

housing Central Administration and Adult Education/Interim Education. Not renewing these leases and finding more cost-effective space for these functions is a priority for me. The savings from this action can be used to support classroom instruction to raise student achievement. Also, the “Persistently Lowest Achieving” grant for T.C. Williams will be expiring this year. The Board – as with all changes—will continue to evaluate which reforms have been most effective before deciding whether to continue funding them.

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12. Despite increasing enrollment, there is a perception that some parents continue to question the quality of Alexandria’s public schools and send their children to private school or to a public school elsewhere. Is this perception accurate, and if so, what can and should the school system do, if anything, to convince these families to stay in Alexandria schools?

With record enrollments, especially in Kindergarten and 6th grade, the evidence does not support a conclusion that those with school age students perceive that our schools are of low quality. As a parent, however, I know that not every school is right for every student. It is therefore appropriate that private and parochial schools provide another option for parents. Nevertheless, there are challenges for raising academic achievement in ACPS that we must address, especially with respect to certain groups of students in certain schools, and the Board is doing that. Addressing these challenges not only is the right thing to do for our

students, it will also correct any misimpressions in the community.

Communication has improved in the past year because the Board has made it a priority. The revamped ACPS website provides a great deal of useful information as does the Education Digest sent to all families and the community. In addition, the School Board has recently set a goal of broadening communication with civic groups.

Last, the School Board, the City Council, and the community must do a better job presenting an accurate picture to our fellow citizens about all the great things for students that are going on in ACPS. TC Williams Principal Suzanne Maxey said it best at this year's back-to-school-night when she said that we all have a responsibility to correct misinformation about our schools and/or to contact ACPS to allow it to provide the accurate information.

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13. There is pressure on school systems to develop rigorous teacher evaluation systems. Virginia requires that 40% of a teacher's evaluation be based on student outcomes. Because the state allows districts some flexibility in determining those outcomes, what makes sense for Alexandria?

Earlier this year the Board adopted the new teacher evaluation system, as required by the State Board of Education. A committee of teachers and administrators was formed by the Superintendent to make a recommendation to the Board. This recommendation included that 20% of a

teacher's evaluation be based on student outcomes. During Board consideration, other Board members did not support 20% and instead wanted to go to 10% or even 0%. I opposed their position because I believe strongly that all of us – School Board, Superintendent, administrators, teachers, parents and the community -- need to be held accountable for student outcomes. I supported the teachers' committee's recommendation because it had the support of the teachers and because I thought it was a reasonable compromise.

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14. Despite much effort, many parents of special needs children do not feel satisfied with the services being provided to their children. Indeed, this is evidenced by the fact that parents are often seeking redress in the courts. What do you think the school board can do to address the issues with the system's efforts to help children with special needs.

This question points to no evidence of a spate of recent court actions involving students requiring special education services, and I am aware of none. In fact, the Board has reduced the number of out-of-division placements of students who need special education services. As noted above, the Board asked a VASS team for recommendations of steps to take to raise achievement for students who need special education services. The result was the development of plans to increase the time these students are in the regular classroom so that they have access to the academic content available to other students and a plan to address the specific needs of students with autism. At the Board's direction, the Administration is implementing the Inclusion Plan and Autism Plan to raise student achievement. The VASS team assessed ACPS's implementation of the team's

recommendations and found that ACPS is making progress. I am committed to continuing to implement these plans and the recommendations of the VASS team.

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15. Despite the increase in enrollment, there are families of young children who still have doubts about ACPS and plan on sending their children to private schools or move out of the city. How can ACPS improve its communication to families of younger children?

This is a duplicate question with Question 12. Please see the response to Question 12.

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16. What is the one decision made by the board in the last six years that you disagreed with and how would you have voted differently?

When I joined the Board in 2008, there was a great deal of turmoil. There were many 5-4 votes, and it was impeding progress of serving students. My election played a strong role in bringing stability to the Board, and this has been a contributing factor to the successes we have had in raising student achievement. I have a track record of building consensus and working collaboratively toward a common goal – abilities critical to this important position.

My response to Question 13 above is a good illustration of how the Board has worked well together to take a consensus approach. Another example is that I pressed the Superintendent and my fellow Board members to speed up the adoption of open enrollment math honors in the middle

schools and the revamping of all of middle school math programs. We do not always agree but we have found a way to work effectively together and with the Superintendent, for the benefit of all of our students. There will be at least 6 new Board members next year, and the ability to work with others is a crucial quality for a well-functioning board.

Because of my 4 years of service on the Board and with three children who have been or are being educated in ACPS, I have the experience, judgment, and commitment to continue to work with my colleagues and the Superintendent for the benefit of all of our children.