

## Support Schools Now Board of Supervisors Questionnaire

Mary Jones

Candidate, Berkeley District

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1. The overriding priority for the WJCC School System should be excellence in education.

The WJCC School System accounts for about one-half of the County Budget, and given that investment, citizens expect education excellence and an uncompromising commitment to provide a safe learning environment for their children. While it is important to fully fund initiatives that support excellence in education, we can do a better job in saving tax payer dollars through better management of school facility design, construction, and project management.

2. I fully support competitive Compensation plans for teachers in order to attract and keep the best and brightest. A performance based compensation system should be established for salary levels, rewarding excellence in the classroom and advanced or specialized achievements. Salaries of other support staff should be competitive as well.

3. Yes, I am committed to provide funding to WJCC schools so that schools are fully staffed. The core curriculum must be a priority to ensure that classes are available that students are required to take to fulfill graduation requirements. For example, there are students being bussed to different high schools for Algebra II/Trig. These types of classes should be available at the students respective school, and bussing students between schools for core classes is neither an efficient use of the students time or school resources.

Certainly, keeping class sizes down and in permanent buildings is important. I understand the desire to have small schools in WJCC, however, you and I both know the expense associated with building and staffing. I would encourage WJCC to revisit their maximum student capacity for elementary, middle, and high schools. Slightly increasing design capacity for each school (by 100 students for example) will accommodate students and teachers and provide opportunities for funding to be directed to teachers salaries, not to construction and operations for as many new schools.

4. Both James City County Government and WJCC Schools have a responsibility to the taxpayers to prioritize their budgets and operate with the highest efficiency level as possible. As a member of the Policy Committee I have been actively involved in CIP recommendations to the Board of Supervisors for the last three years. I have supported the requests for new schools (Warhill and Matoaka) and strongly encouraged that our schools be maintained at the highest level possible.

WJCC school administration does consume a large part of the school budget that could be directed to the classrooms. Transportation is also an area that needs to be refined. While I applaud the creativity behind the tiered start times for schools, bussing students throughout the day for classes that should be readily available in their own school is not efficient.

I strongly believe that while funding our schools is extremely important, we must be results oriented. Funding in and of itself does not ensure Excellence in Education.

5. The Board of Supervisors and the School Board should be working collaboratively to make decisions that are in the best interest of James City County. As a Planning Commissioner and Policy Committee member I have encouraged communication between development management and schools. As a result of my efforts, development management provided WJCC schools with a map of proposed development – a first. We must encourage communication and collaboration for better planning. I believe the historic lack of communication and collaboration has been costly. I will continue to bridge the gap and encourage WJCC schools to be an active participant in the upcoming Comprehensive Plan Update.

6. Certainly funds requested by schools or any county agency for that matter must be spent on the requested item. I do think the Supervisors, through the budgetary process, are within their role emphasize core curriculum and encourage schools to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of their programs and operations.

7. Eminent Domain should only be used as an absolute last resort. Eminent Domain has proven to be very costly and taking private property from citizens should be discouraged. This is where proper planning comes into play. The County owns a substantial amount of property and Stonehouse is proposing a proffer for two school sites.

8. I think the most recent budget snafu is evidence that James City County fiscal policy must be reformed. The tax and spend then tax again approach must stop. Currently the County Budget train has already left the station by the time citizens receive their reassessments. A budgetary process that establishes spending levels prior to reassessments just doesn't make sense. No business would approve an expense and capital budget without first establishing the revenue component. How can staff levels, salary increases, travel and personal expenses, training costs, consulting fees and other expenses be approved before first understanding how much money you have to spend? The budgetary process in James City County is backwards and we have seen the result with the reported "shortfall" of \$2.96 million as reported in the Daily Press.

Synchronizing reassessments with the budget process is a much more efficient and transparent approach. Supervisors, County administration and other County agencies such as Police and Fire, WJCC Schools and Parks and Recreation will have a more informed knowledge of County revenue and can plan accordingly. More importantly, citizens will have an opportunity to address the tax rate and County spending proposals before the ink has dried on their reassessments.

9. Education programs for at risk 4-year olds, such as Head Start, provide an important opportunity not only for the children, but their families as well. While I do support education for at risk 4-year olds, I feel strongly that parents of children not considered

at-risk, are more than capable of preparing their children for Kindergarten, and deciding for themselves if pre-k is best for their family.

10. A firm commitment to alternative education for at risk children, such as the Center for Educational Opportunities, should be made. We must assess the effectiveness of these programs and issue periodic reports to the taxpayer.

11. As a parent of a child who has attended Matthew Whaley Elementary, Clara Byrd Elementary, Berkeley Middle School, and now Jamestown High School I am very aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the school system. As a Planning Commissioner, my involvement in the CIP process has made me acutely aware of the budgetary needs of WJCC Schools. Additionally, the growth we have seen in James City County and the delay in making sure our infrastructure is keeping up has put a strain on our schools. I will promote true planning between county agencies so we stay ahead of the curve and everyone is on the same page (enrollment projections included).