

**2024 ACEA**  
**Allegany County Board of Education**  
**Candidate Questionnaire**

CANDIDATE: \_\_\_ Gerry LaFemina \_\_\_\_\_

OFFICE SOUGHT: \_\_\_ Board Member \_\_\_\_\_

CAMPAIGN ADDRESS: \_\_\_ 209 W Mechanic St Frostburg, MD 21532 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

PHONE NUMBER(S): \_\_\_ 340.580.6677 \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL:  
\_\_\_ gerrylafeminaforBoE@gmail.com \_\_\_\_\_

WEBSITE: \_\_\_ gerrylafemina.com/board-of-ed \_\_\_\_\_

*I confirm that the responses provided here are my official positions in seeking local office and I understand that ACEA reserves the right to share my responses with members and interested parties.*

**CANDIDATE SIGNATURE:** \_\_\_\_\_ **DATE SUBMITTED:** \_\_\_\_\_

*Candidates: To be considered for a recommendation, you must indicate your response to each of the questions. Clarifications, explanations, and other information may be attached, but please be certain to clearly indicate the questions(s) to which you refer. **Please return your completed and signed questionnaire to ACEA.***

## Education Funding

### **Background Points**

- With a critical need in closing education gaps, expanding programs and services, community schools, and improving student achievement, in 2016, lawmakers formed the Kirwan Commission to meet the challenges of a changing global economy and prepare Maryland students to be successful citizens in the 21st century.
- The Kirwan Commission's recommendations evolved into The Blueprint for Maryland's Future, which originally passed in 2020, was vetoed by Governor Hogan, and had its veto overridden in 2021. The Blueprint revises the state's school funding formula for the first time in nearly two decades. Over the next 13 years, the Blueprint calls for billions of dollars of new investment in Maryland schools that would expand career and technical education programs, community schools, and pre-k; provide more resources for students from backgrounds of poverty and students with special needs; increase educator pay; hire more educators and expand and diversify the educator pipeline; and create a new, more rigorous accountability system. These programs are designed to raise achievement and address Maryland's economic inequality with programs to target concentrated poverty.
- The Board of Education will have a significant impact on implementation of the Blueprint, including future funding and success of Allegany County schools. The Blueprint is landmark legislation, but there is a continued need for investment in Allegany County schools to see that the Blueprint is successfully implemented, and in ensuring that educator voices are heard and respected throughout implementation.

1. Please provide your general and specific thoughts on how the county can address the unmet needs facing our schools. Detail how you would prioritize available state and county resources in your budget deliberations.

First and foremost, I think our schools face unprecedented challenges: our students have school lunch debt, many graduate unprepared for their adult lives, and teachers take the blame for when students don't succeed. Add to this, issues regarding school attendance since the pandemic, and problems that plague our area (unemployment, opioid usage issues, crime, etc) we can see the difficulties our teachers and our students face everyday.

It's easy to say funding is an answer to these problems, and surely with issues like school lunch debt. Writing the grants and making sure we have the additional resources necessary to ensure that our students can eat healthy lunches without incurring debt is easy, it just takes will and effort. Issues like food insecurity are not

only a “school” concern but a greater regional concern, and to this end, the Board of Ed might often need to see itself as an institution that works with other county and city resources.

The other issues facing our schools are more dramatic. I'm a firm believer that smaller classrooms allow teachers more flexibility and provide less opportunity for disengaged students to vanish in the back of the room, but that needs to be coupled with giving teachers the opportunity to be creative in the classroom: only by allowing our educators to fly can they inspire our students. From my family's experience, my son left an MAT program because he felt he wouldn't be allowed to be a creative teacher. He believed he'd need to follow template lesson plans rather than find ways in which he could present information to students that might excite and engage them. Most teachers come to the classroom because they love something, but often the bureaucracy and the workload can make them forget that passion, or have it get lost in the paperwork of oversight. It's hard to stay curious and current about the subject when the demands outside of the classroom but inside the school building are overwhelming. By freeing up the classroom experience, we might be able to recruit more teachers and better teachers.

By letting teachers be themselves, by letting them explore unique—personal—ways of teaching they might win the respect of their students. Yes, it's important that all students feel validated and respected but it's equally important that all teachers feel validated and respected. Often. It can feel like high schools are a football team with a school connected to them. School sports are incredible ways of building school spirit and engaging alums, but so too, are school newspapers, art shows, plays, and bands. Celebrating our student success whether on the basketball court or in the Poetry Out Loud competitions should be equally valued and celebrated. And surely our best students need to be lauded.

And that requires teachers to be lauded and respected—by administrators, by the students, and by the community at large. This starts with paying teachers the wage of a professional. I've known too many teachers who had to work in service jobs in the summer because their professional wage didn't afford them to actually assess their classroom experience, return to their passion for a subject, and maybe make new lesson plans. Too many people think teachers are glorified babysitters with “summers off” and changing that perception is a low-cost, high-reward item. By changing the public narrative about what teachers do we can create an environment where teachers and what's taught are not only valued but supported. So much of the power of the purse should be spent on the class, but the Board of Ed can do more—for free—to be present in community settings that celebrate our teachers in a variety of ways in public settings outside of the Board of Ed meetings. This would justify higher salaries, smaller classrooms, and more.

Classrooms, too, need to be more flexible with more technology—where warranted. But we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that we need to emphasize our humanity, too. Technology comes with challenges, but as AI is able to do more, remembering the things AI and tech can't do will be a key factor for our future with technology.

Lastly, classrooms should be safe. But we need to be careful that we never forget kids are kids. They're going to test boundaries. They're going to test authority; they're going to misbehave. There are smart and constructive ways of dealing with this, ways that don't require more security, which can often make students and teachers feel more insecure, and which shifts our resources away from education.

2. There is considerable room for improvement in addressing educator recruitment and retention. Class sizes have increased because of cost-cutting measures and/or due to hiring freezes, layoffs, and retirements. Many support personnel positions have been eliminated. And Maryland is always challenged with filling educator jobs because we import nearly half of all certificated teachers from prep programs in other states. The coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated these shortages. At the same time, the Blueprint calls for the hiring of 15,000 additional educators to provide more individualized attention to students. How will you address critical concerns with educator recruitment and retention?

The value of our educators can't be underscored enough, and recent trends of parents micromanaging the classroom cause more problems than they solve: when teaching is already undervalued in our culture, making the job of teachers *harder* is a way of harming the education of all students.

First and foremost, we have to create wages that provide a professional wage: most of our teachers have the same amount of schooling (and student loan debt) as other professionals who make three or four times as much. By raising wages and returning respect for teachers as professionals by raising their visibility in the community needs to be a priority. We heard a lot about essential workers during the pandemic: teachers are forgotten essential workers. They had to learn how to move their entire lesson plans online, work with new technology, often having to incur costly technological upgrades out of pocket, and then had to help students with their own computer issues. And they had to do this over the course of a week end many of them.

More, the tax overhaul of 2017 meant that a lot of out-of-pocket teaching expenses are no longer tax deductible, and I think lobbying for a tax break for teachers shouldn't be out of the question, either.

As I said before, we have to restore trust in our teachers and our education system, and that starts in the building: as I said earlier, teachers need to be creative in their approaches to education and be forward looking, and that requires time to pursue their passion and given professional development opportunities to look into what's next in education, rather than pursue reactive in-service days. We need to provide flexibility to the classroom.

Lastly, we need more professional assistance in the school building—I know when the Luke Paper Mill closed, students dealt with all sorts of family trauma that fell on the teachers to help with. By providing more social service support in the classroom and in the community, teachers can be one part of a broader and more effective safety net for our students. More, a better student safety net will provide teachers with a greater opportunity to focus on teach *and* improve our students' capacity to learn.

## Public Funding for Private Schools

### **Background Points**

- ACEA believes any education dollars spent outside of improving public schools makes it harder to make the progress necessary to provide a world-class education for every student.
- Non-public school funding for programs in the budget such as textbooks, technology, school construction, and vouchers reduce the state's General Fund while subsidizing the cost of private education. Data from the first few years of the BOOST program indicated that more than 70% of voucher recipients already attended and paid for private school before receiving the voucher.
- The Maryland State Department of Education requires a certificate of approval or registration for private schools; it does not accredit or license them. Private schools do not have to report or administer teacher qualifications, class sizes, adherence to College and Career Readiness Standards, student retention rates, graduation rates, demographics, or discipline or suspension policies. Without these measures, it is impossible to effectively evaluate the programs funneling public tax dollars to private schools.

3. As a Board member, are you in favor of allocating public funding to home and privately schooled students?

Support

Oppose

Additional Comments:

My early education was in a private, parochial school. I received a good education. My high school education was in a public school, and I received a better education. Taking money away from public schools does nothing to improve the public schools and does little to improve the mission of private schools.

## Evaluations and Less Testing, More Learning

### **Background Points**

- ACEA believes that educator evaluation systems must be educator-informed, research-based, and collaboratively developed. Evaluation systems should be fair, transparent, timely, rigorous, valid, and designed to improve instruction by focusing on teaching and learning.
- Maryland law mandates that student growth is a “significant component” and “one of the multiple measures” in a teacher’s evaluation. No evaluation criterion can account for more than 35%. The law also mandates that evaluation systems must be mutually agreed upon at the local level.
- A key provision of evaluation systems is the requirement for local agreement between school boards, superintendents, and local associations. Such local development allows for the evaluation system to meet the unique needs of each district.
- ACEA believes the continued push for high-stakes student assessments undermines educator’s creativity and their ability to respond to the needs of students. Instead of high-stakes assessments, ACEA supports high-quality assessments that support student learning from a rich curriculum and with room for educator’s voices in the development of curriculum and assessment.
- Additionally, ACEA supports rigorous and relevant professional development through the continued alignment of evaluation systems.

4. Do you support or oppose local autonomy to develop evaluation systems in compliance with statute and regulation?

Support  Oppose

Additional Comments:

Local autonomy is key. It needs to consider both state requirements and local issues and concerns. More to the point, local teachers, school personnel, and the community at large understand the needs of our students and the challenges they face, and the capacity of our teachers. Personally, I want to lower the stakes of student assessments and pursue creative approaches to assessment.

5. Do you support or oppose efforts to overturn school districts mutually agreed upon, statutorily compliant evaluation models in pursuit of one-size-fits-all models developed by federal and state agencies, rather than local education agencies?

Support

Oppose

Additional Comments:

See above.

6. As an elected Board of Education member, how will you work with ACPS, ACEA to implement the Less Testing, More Learning Act?

Support

Oppose

Additional Comments:

High-stakes testing does not assess much of anything: often students have memorized answers through drill-and-kill methodologies chock full of information that they forget once the test is complete (if not sooner). The capacity to assess how well a student has learned may not even be "clear" for years afterward. I've had students at the University who have reached out to me years later to say they only discovered recently how valuable what I taught them was.

More importantly, when I think back to my teachers from elementary and high school, it's not only *what* they taught me that stands out, but how they taught me. These are important measures of what I've learned about being an adult, a person, a lifelong learner, a critical and creative thinker, and a member of the community—none of which can be measured on a standardized test.

## Collective Bargaining

### **Background Points**

- ACEA supports efforts to protect and enhance the state's collective bargaining laws.
- Collective bargaining is the negotiation of a contract – including wages, salary scale, benefits, and working conditions – between employers and employees. The items agreed to in a ratified collective bargaining agreement apply to all employees in a bargaining unit, providing a benefit to employees and employers in not having to negotiate thousands of individual contracts.

7. Do you support or oppose public education employees' rights to bargain collectively?

Support

Oppose

Additional Comments:

As the former Vice President of the Kirtland Federation of Teachers (Michigan), I firmly support the capacity of teachers to collectively bargain and organize.

8. How familiar are you with the ACEA contracts?

Familiar

Unfamiliar

Additional Comments:

Currently, I'm researching the contracts and history of these contracts in the county.



9. What changes, if any, would you like to see? And how would you honor the negotiated agreement, especially in tight fiscal times?

Teachers need to be paid a professional wage. Period. It's this simple, we will continue to have underprepared teachers, overcrowded classrooms, and other problems if we don't pay teachers well. I know the impact of furloughs, frozen wages, and other issues. Such things undercut morale and make the job harder.

School districts need to remember that the schools are a part of a community and a statewide system, as well as a national network of education opportunities: from grants to lobbying, from working with community members and county organizations to find creative budgetary solutions to help insure our schools are well prepared is a key aspect to the Board's job.

## Continuing Impact of the Pandemic

### **Background Points**

- The pandemic has exacerbated a pre-existing, multifaceted housing crisis. Housing costs continue to rise, keeping some families out of the market entirely, while those whose incomes were slashed during the pandemic have fallen so far behind that the Census Bureau estimates 7 million households as of late June 2021 face eviction when the temporary moratorium on eviction enacted during the pandemic is lifted.
- The pandemic has also increased stresses, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), food insecurity, and digital divide issues for our students.

10. How will you address increased needs for mental health support for students and educators in the wake of the pandemic?

One of the urgent needs of our time requires that we engage the mental and emotional health crises of our students. The CoVid-19 Pandemic exacerbated an already growing problem, a problem made worse by outdated notions about mental health and a real failure to discuss the real concerns on this front.

Removing the stigma from mental health care would go a long way to engaging the mental health needs of our students. In my own classrooms at the university level, I often begin with a “check in” to see—in broad strokes—how my students are doing and how I can work with them to stay on task but also adapt to their needs. Implementing something similar in homeroom sessions might allow schools to check the stress levels of students in small and “friendly” spaces. This information can then be shared with social workers and psychologists to help watch for trouble.

Again, though, I think it's important to keep in mind that the schools ought to be part of an integrated county system that engages all sorts of community resources so that the teachers—with little training—are not attempting to engage the mental health concerns of their students.

11. The pandemic further illuminated the immediate need for reliable, affordable access to technology for all students and educators in our state. How would you propose to eliminate the digital divide?

Again and again I think it's important for the schools to not exist in a vacuum; by working with private organizations, businesses, and educational partners (the Allegany County Public Library, ACM, Frostburg State), I would like to think that overcoming the technological challenges of the regions underserved students would not be hardship. Creating opportunity centers where students could have access to internet and computers—and transportation to such spaces—would go along way to help provide students with a means to the technology necessary for their success. Grants and private funds could also be used to help create “loaner” tech designed to help provide students for more immediate needs.

## Racial and Social Justice

### **Background Points**

- ACEA unequivocally believe that our diversity makes us stronger. We fundamentally believe that schools should be safe, welcoming, and nurturing learning environments for students of all backgrounds and beliefs, and places where all our students see themselves in the lessons they learn and experiences they enjoy. While students of color made up approximately 64% of the student population across the state in school year 2019-2020, our state had only 29% teachers of color, 38% principals of color, and 45% assistant principals of color. MSEA was represented on the Kirwan Commission and a vocal advocate of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future in part because of our support for training and developing high-quality teachers and education leaders, particularly those from diverse and historically underrepresented backgrounds.
- Every child, regardless of their background or zip code, deserves education justice and equitable access to opportunities, resources, and supports. We believe that the lives of our Black and Brown students matter and that all our students have a fundamental right to be educated in safe, healthy, and supportive learning communities and all our educators deserve safe, healthy, and supportive working environments.
- The history of Maryland and U.S. history is far more diverse than is generally reflected in the content and courses currently taught in our public schools. Far too many Marylanders can progress through their formal primary and secondary education and rarely, if ever, see themselves reflected in the content they are learning or hear about themselves in the stories they read and are told. This lack of inclusivity negatively impacts not only our students' ownership of and agency in their learning, but it also adversely impacts their overall engagement in their learning and portrays a one-sided view of our history for all students. This disconnect is further exacerbated by the dearth of a more diverse field of educators in our schools and by the disproportionate (and sometime inaccurate) representations seen in society and in our culture that ultimately reinforces a sense of "otherness" for the people, communities, and cultures who have been rendered less relevant and less valuable. ACEA recognize the vital importance of ensuring that all students learn about historical figures who not only had a tremendous impact on the forming of our state and our nation but whose actions and sacrifices laid the foundation upon which this nation's pledge of "liberty and justice for all" must be built.
- ACEA are committed to developing critical thinking skills in our students because we know that they enable them to better understand the problems our society faces and to develop collective solutions. To that end, we are abundantly clear that truth and honesty are fundamental components of teaching and learning, as are academic integrity and professional responsibility. Our essential mission is to prepare our students for college, career, and life and to play an active role in our democracy.

12. ACEA supports honesty in education. To encourage critical thinking, we believe educators should have professional autonomy and should be afforded the deference to teach the truth in their classrooms, schools, and districts. Do you support or oppose this position?

Support

Oppose

Additional Comments:

The Allegany County, Maryland and United States that our current students graduate into will be more diverse than the one their parents or their grandparents graduated into. We ought to prepare our students for this future by acknowledging the complicated and uncomfortable truths of our history.

13. How will you support diversity, equity, and inclusion for all students throughout the county? What specific policies do you support whose goals are focused on providing equitable access, opportunities, resources, and supports?

I grew up in one of the most diverse cities in the world—New York City—and went to high school with students of every race, creed, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. This made me a more compassionate and more understanding person, and has served me well in my careers, both as a university professor and writer.

Key to being a teacher of diversity and a supporter of diversity is for us to celebrate it every day in our personal lives—through our friendships, through our engagement with organizations that support diversity (the NAACP, PRIDE) but also for us to remember that diversity includes people who may not be as openminded as we are. Engagement—healthy and mutually respectful engagement—goes a long way to creating inclusivity and equitable access to education.

I do think it's key to provide opportunity for students to see diversity in the community by providing resources to volunteer with organizations doing good works and engaging the diversity that already exists in Allegany County. I also think it behooves individual schools to consider teach-ins, and working with regional resources to help provide students access to and the importance of the diverse communities of the area, whether it be learning about the lost community of Brownsville In Frostburg, to the history of native lands in the County.

## Community Schools

### **Background Points**

- Poverty dramatically and negatively affects the wellbeing of children, particularly in the areas of physical health, mental health, safe housing, access to technology, parental support, family planning services, nutrition, youth employment, and education. Each of these areas play a large role in whether students can learn and do well in school—making it imperative that these opportunity gaps be closed if we want to provide an equitable education in our communities. According to data collected by MSDE, In 2022, 48% of Maryland public school students were enrolled for free and reduced-price meals this school year (meaning their family income level is at or below 185% of federal income poverty guidelines).
- ACEA supports the establishment of community schools. We recognize that community schools can be transformative if done right—that is if they involve the community in a meaningful and ongoing way and are more than wrap-around services at a school.
- Community schools generally have the following four components: (1) they serve a high concentration of students in poverty; (2) they employ a full-time coordinator to lead community school-related services; (3) they conduct a needs assessment to identify key obstacles to learning and the services needed to close the opportunity gaps; and (4) they work with community partners to bring those needed services into the school building or nearby locations to make them accessible to students and community members.
- The Blueprint phases in community schools beginning in FY20, starting with 219 schools with 80% or more of their students enrolled for free and reduced-price meals. Community schools will be added, phased in according to highest levels of poverty first, until FY27, when a predicted 557—nearly one-third of all schools in the state—are projected to become community schools. That makes this one of the largest scale expansions of community schools in the nation.
- ACEA supports equitable and adequate resources to provide every student with an opportunity to learn in a safe and non-disruptive environment. Establishing and funding community schools is a research-based strategy for closing opportunity gaps and building strong communities.

9. Do you support or oppose local efforts to create and support community schools in areas of concentrated poverty? Do you support the transformative model of community schools or the wrap-around service model of community schools?

Support

Oppose

Additional Comments:

As someone who grew up in a single-parent household in the 1970s and 80s, I understand the struggle and effect of poverty and financial hardship on households and on students. Schools can transform a community and more importantly schools can transform a student's life. I'm a first-generation college student: we should be supporting schools as a community resource and part of a network of community resources available.

## Parental Involvement and Public Support

### **Background Points**

- It is calculated that school age children spend 70% of their waking hours (including weekends and holidays) outside of school.
- Research shows that the most consistent predictors of children's academic achievement and social adjustment are parental involvement in schools and parental expectations of the child's academic attainment and satisfaction with their child's education at school.
- Additionally, research indicates there are three major factors that influence parental involvement in schools:
  - Parents' belief that they can impact what is important, necessary on behalf of their children school.
  - The extent to which parents believe that they can have a positive influence on their children's education; and
  - Parents' perceptions that their children and school want them to be involved.

14. As a Board member, what would you do to ensure that parents and families from all faiths and no matter where they're from are welcomed and supported in our schools?

Student involvement is essential in student support, but that may not translate into being able to be "involved" with the school—many parents work multiple jobs, but I think we need to encourage students to be involved as they can and when they can, and more importantly encourage their involvement in their child's school work and learning. Sometimes it can seem that parents think it's only the teachers' jobs to educate their students, but so much comes from parental involvement, training, etc.

One thing that might encourage more parent involvement would be to have one quarterly board meeting happen at a time when more parents might be able to attend—a 5:00 session is "right after work" for typical 9-5 workers, but many of our parents don't have such jobs or those who do have such hours have other responsibilities right after work.

I also think that modern technology such as Zoom and Social Media might provide opportunities for parental engagement that didn't exist 20 years ago. Surely creating avenues for the parents to be involved in new and engaging ways—whether through student/grade organized newsletters or "team building" programs designed to bring students, family, and teachers together, might help. For instance,



I have been involved in student-teacher basketball games or other events, but what if there was a parent vs teachers event (trivia, etc). It's not only about engaging each other as parents and teachers, but engaging them as fellow community members.

## Privatization

### **Background Points**

- ACEA oppose any effort to outsource or privatize education jobs that are part of a bargaining unit. We maintain that any attempt to outsource or privatize jobs of public educators violates collective bargaining agreements because such an effort is in essence terminating or firing bargaining unit positions.
- Outsourcing and privatization efforts have threatened teacher and education support professional (ESP) jobs for years. In the last few years, Anne Arundel County has attempted to outsource teaching services for deaf and blind students, Talbot County has discussed privatizing transportation services, and Kent County has attempted to privatize custodial services. There have been multi-county efforts on the Eastern Shore to outsource the hiring of occupational therapists and physical therapists to work in the schools.
- When jobs are outsourced, quality control is diminished, and safety is compromised. Public employees are subject to background checks that private employers often do not require. After privatizing, local school boards lose control over the individuals working in schools and have little ability to provide input on job performance.
- Privatizers often use an argument of cost-savings as a means of winning contracts. The amount is often misleading because they intentionally underestimate first year operating costs. Ultimately, they reduce hours, health care coverage, or just cut jobs. All these steps lead to increase in local unemployment and less money in the community overall.

15. As a Board member, are you in favor of contracting out custodial, cafeteria, and maintenance services rather than have those services provided by Board of Education employees?

Support

Oppose

Additional Comments:

Such farming out of these jobs to contractors may "save money" but these jobs pay less (thus hurting the local economy and the dignity of the workers) and affecting the very tax base that funds the schools.

## Essay Question

What are the top three things you would like to accomplish in the next four years if you are elected to the Board?

One of the most important things I'd like to do as an ACPS Board Member is to focus on student needs, teacher retention, and articulating plan for the future. The Blueprint establishes some broad goals in terms of teacher recruitment and a broad plan for the state schools, but more can be done.

It seems, right now, that so much of the discussion in public education is reactionary—some group is making a noise about pedagogy or course content, and the government, the Board of Education or individual principals, have to respond to it. Immediately. This is no way to run a school. It's no way to run a business or a family. Acting through reacting can cause us to waste training, strategic planning, and often our values. It undermines teachers, which can affect teacher retention, and it sends the wrong message to our students. That's not to say that we shouldn't respond to dangerous conditions, abusive language, and other concerns, but when it comes to issues of pedagogy and teaching styles, when it comes to concerns about inclusion, it's important for the school board to listen to parental concerns, but also to keep in mind that the experts in the room are the teachers, teachers the Board hired because they were the best person for the job.

That trust in the teachers goes a long way to retaining them. I am so glad to see a robust Teacher of the Year program in Allegany County because that emphasizes the value we put on educators and innovative and engaging teaching. Moving toward better pay and smaller class sizes is also a start. I've said many things over the course of this questionnaire about encouraging creative and more individualized classroom pedagogy, and it seems essential that we help teachers find new ways to present material to our students that engage them to be active learners. This means less drill and kill and more critical and creative problem-solving.

It may also mean more intradisciplinary teamwork and also more cross-curricula learning that finds connections between subjects rather than these columns. A mathematical proof is a type of written argument, after all. One of the things studies show is that the complex issues of the world—from global climate change to the changing economic landscape—require interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches.

And the fact is, we can't assume that the future will remain static. Ten years ago, programming skills were essential for future jobs, but AI will write better programs with fewer bugs than most programmers in a quarter of the time. Therefore, teachers also need to work together to distinguish not only what we're teaching for the present, but

also what we're teaching to prepare our students for the future, one that may be hard to imagine. No matter what, a reckoning with our reliance on technology may be coming. How do we help our students celebrate the human may be essential to the next generation.

All this means keeping our students engaged with others and with their learning. As educators our first job is to our students and to prepare them not only to know arithmetic, history, science, literature, art, etc, but also know how to interact with each other, with authority, with the changing world not with fear but with curiosity and empathy. They need to have self-awareness as metacognition is part of what makes us human, and they have to be willing to challenge themselves and to be challenged. This means recognizing that others have had different experiences that our students can learn from.

Students, of course, have all sorts of things vying for their attention—from smart phones to video games, from Lego to sports. As an educator, my job has often been to get my students to say “oh, this is something I want to give some of my time to.” Helping students feel impassioned about a subject is key to education. It's the job of the entire school district to make sure that happens.