



2026 Allegany County Board of Education Candidate Questionnaire

CANDIDATE : Caren Phillips-Kurtz

OFFICE SOUGHT : Board of Education

CAMPAIGN ADDRESS: 10506 Shortest Day Road NW
LaVale, MD 21502

PHONE NUMBER(S): (301)707-9776

CAMPAIGN EMAIL: caren.kurtz@gmail.com

CAMPAIGN WEBSITE: caren4boe.com

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

CANDIDATE SIGNATURE: Caren Phillips-Kurtz DATE SUBMITTED: 7/22/26

Candidates: *To be considered for a recommendation, you must indicate your response to each of the questions. You may use more space than is provided to elaborate on your answers and provide clarification, explanation, and other context, but please be certain to clearly indicate the questions(s) to which you refer. Please return your completed and signed questionnaire to **Allegany County Education Association**.*

Education Funding and Local Budgets:

1. What are your top three budget priorities for the public school system?

My top three budget priorities include:

Safety: Physical, Social, and Emotional Safety – Ensuring every student and staff member learns and works in a safe, supportive environment where they feel respected, valued, and able to succeed.

Student Opportunity and Innovation – Expanding future-ready opportunities for all students through access to innovative programs, career and technical education, workforce development, college readiness, and emerging technologies such as AI.

Supporting and Maintaining Excellent Educators and Staff – Recruiting, retaining, and supporting high-quality educators and staff through competitive compensation, strong professional development, mentorship, recognition, and a positive workplace culture.

2. How you would utilize your budget authority to address shortfalls facing our schools if the state or federal government reduces their commitment(s)?

If state or federal funding is reduced, I would use strategic, data-driven budgeting to prioritize student needs and protect essential services. I would collaborate with local government, community partners, and fellow Board members to advocate for funding, pursue grant opportunities, and build partnerships with local businesses. By using data, such as student enrollment, staffing needs, program effectiveness, and student outcomes, I would work to ensure resources are allocated where they will have the greatest impact on student success.

3. In many schools, educators are dealing with high class sizes and caseloads. How will you help address critical concerns with educator recruitment and retention in order to ensure we can increase staffing to reduce class sizes and caseloads?

I would support educator recruitment and retention by strengthening partnerships with local colleges and businesses, expanding mentoring programs, and advocating for competitive salaries and benefits. Building on our strong relationships with Frostburg State University and Allegany College of Maryland, I would work to create pathways to encourage future educators to join Allegany County Public Schools.

I also believe that listening to our employees is essential. By gathering staff feedback through engagement surveys and involving educators and support staff in decision-making, we can better understand their needs and create a positive workplace culture. Supporting

employees through meaningful recognition, ongoing professional growth, and effective mentoring programs will help attract, develop, and retain excellent staff for our students.

Finally, I would work with school leaders to ensure we have the right people in the right positions, providing the support and resources employees need to succeed. Allegany County Public Schools already has outstanding professionals, and investing in them is one of the best ways to support student achievement.

4. Do you commit to honoring the role of your elected body in upholding the policy and funding mandates associated with the Blueprint for Maryland's Future?

 X Yes

 No

Additional Comments:

5. Please discuss your philosophy related to charter schools. Do you believe they should be added in our county public school structure?

I do not believe that adding charter schools would strengthen our public school system. Instead, I believe we should focus on creating exceptional opportunities for all students by investing in high-quality educators, professional development, up-to-date resources, and innovative programs that engage students and prepare them with the critical thinking and problem-solving skills needed for future success.

Public Funding for Private Schools

6. Do you support or oppose allocating public funding to non-public school students through voucher programs?

 Support

 X Oppose

Additional Comments: I believe public funding should remain with students attending public schools.

7. Do you support or oppose allowing non-public school students to participate in public school extracurricular activities (sports, clubs, etc.)?

_____ Support

___X___ Oppose

Additional Comments:

Collective Bargaining

8. Do you support or oppose school employees gaining the right to strike?

_____ Support

_____ Oppose

Additional Comments:

I believe a strike should be a last resort option after all efforts to reach a collaborative solution have been exhausted. My goal would be to work proactively with school employees to address concerns through open communication, transparency, and shared problem-solving. While any decision must consider the impact on students, employees deserve to have their voices heard and their needs addressed. Building strong, trust-based partnerships can help prevent conflicts and support positive outcomes for everyone involved.

9. What is your understanding of the nature of the relationship between the Board of Education, Superintendent, county government, and union as it relates to negotiations, budget development, and administration of schools? How do you see yourself utilizing the power of your office in working within this structure?

The Board of Education, the Superintendent, the county government, and the union each play an important role. The Superintendent oversees the overall, day-to-day operations of the school system. The elected Board oversees the Superintendent, sets policy, ensures accountability, approves the budget, and provides financial oversight. School and district leaders help identify priorities and needs, and the finance department works with the Superintendent to develop a proposed budget for the Board's review. The county government provides funding and balances the school system's needs with other county priorities, while the union represents and advocates for employees.

Negotiations require collaboration among all parties, including Human Resources representatives, employee representatives, school system leadership, and the Board of Education. All groups work together to reach agreements that support employees while remaining fiscally responsible and focused on student success. I experienced this process as an assistant principal by representing my colleagues during negotiations.

As a member of the Board of Education, I would encourage open, transparent, and ongoing communication. Each party should be responsible for sharing relevant data to understand the needs of our schools, the local community, and the workforce. I would listen to stakeholders, review data objectively, and advocate for solutions that support students and employees.

10. How do you balance honoring ratified contracts with public employees in the county, including educators, with other priorities, especially in tight fiscal times?

Honoring ratified contracts would be a top priority to maintain trust and stability within the school system. My goal would be to uphold commitments to employees while maintaining student safety and achievement as top priorities. I would work with stakeholders to prioritize funding and seek grant opportunities to help meet the school system's needs.

11. Do you support or oppose public negotiations, where members of the public and educators are able to witness collective bargaining between our school system and union negotiating teams?

☒ Support ☐ Oppose

Additional Comments:

12. Do you commit to meeting with union leadership to talk about the needs facing our schools (including salary and staffing levels) and the revenue or other budget actions necessary to meet those needs?

☒ Yes ☐ No

Additional Comments:

Racial and Social Justice:

13. To encourage critical thinking within our classrooms, we believe educators should have professional autonomy on how to implement curriculum to meet the needs of our students. Do you support or oppose this position?

☒ Support ☐ Oppose

Additional Comments:

14. Do you support or oppose a curriculum that reflects the perspective and background of diverse learners? How would you respond to political pressure requesting changes to content and curriculum?

 X Support

 Oppose

Additional Comments:

I would use research-based evidence to emphasize the importance of creating supportive learning environments that value diverse learners and perspectives. Every student deserves to feel safe, respected, and a sense of belonging. When students do not feel physically or emotionally safe, their ability to learn is impacted. As a school system, we are responsible for supporting all students and ensuring they have equitable opportunities to succeed. Exposure to diverse perspectives helps students build empathy, strengthen relationship skills, and develop the critical thinking and problem-solving abilities needed to work effectively with others. These experiences help create stronger schools, stronger communities, and a culture where all students can thrive.

15. What specific policy goals and objectives will you pursue aimed at addressing racial and social justice, including support of diversity, equity, and inclusion for all students and providing equitable access, opportunities, resources, and supports?

Maryland's COMAR regulations provide a strong framework for advancing equity and opportunity for all students. I would reinforce Maryland's Educational Equity regulations by applying an "equity lens" when reviewing local policies and decisions. As a Board member, I would support policies that ensure all students are treated with respect in safe, inclusive learning environments free from discrimination and have equitable access to the resources, opportunities, and supports they need to succeed and reach their full potential.

16. Immigration enforcement is a matter of federal jurisdiction. What is your position on how local law enforcement should interact with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement? And how will you work to ensure school grounds, bus stops, and other school spaces are safe havens against immigration enforcement actions?

Local law enforcement should focus on keeping our community, especially our students, safe. I believe all students should feel safe and supported while on school property, regardless of their background. I would work with local law enforcement, including the Allegany County Sheriff's Office, to ensure school policies and nondiscrimination protections are upheld so that all students and families are treated with dignity, respect, and fairness. It is also important that school employees understand the procedures and legal requirements

that apply if immigration enforcement officials seek access to school property. Ongoing communication with legal counsel can help ensure that Board members and school employees understand their responsibilities, protect students' rights, and follow all applicable laws and policies. My priority would be maintaining safe, welcoming learning environments where all students can focus on learning and achieving success, regardless of immigration status.

17. Stable, safe, and affordable housing is necessary for all students to be able to succeed in school and in the recruitment of educators, including education support professionals, to live in the communities they serve. How do you plan to address the housing crisis in the county?

Addressing the housing crisis requires collaboration among the school system, local government, housing organizations, community agencies, businesses, and economic development leaders. Stable housing is essential for student success, as housing instability can negatively impact attendance, learning, and relationships. As a Board member for the Allegany County Department of Social Services, I have developed relationships with agencies that support families, and I would work to strengthen partnerships that connect students, families, and employees to available resources. I would also advocate for solutions that support affordable housing and create a culture where employees feel comfortable seeking assistance when needed. By bringing organizations together and improving service coordination, we can better meet families' needs and strengthen our community.

Privatization and Support for Education Support Professionals

18. Are you in favor of contracting out custodial, cafeteria, and maintenance services rather than have those services provided by Board of Education employees?

_____ Support

___X___ Oppose

Additional Comments: Individuals providing these services for the school system should be employees of the school system.

19. Too many ESPs work second jobs and struggle to provide for their families, buy homes, save for their futures, and afford community or four-year college tuition for their children to learn a trade and plan a career. The looming threats of privatization by school districts, which would import even lower-paid workers from outside areas, risk the stability of schools and communities and further undermine the value of ESPs and their jobs.

ESPs across the state are organizing to build presence, strength, and power in a campaign focused on a bill of rights that defines the issues long nagging these dedicated employees and now threatening not only the recruitment of new employees but the retention of dedicated veteran employees. You can read about the [ESP Bill of Rights here](#).

Do you support the ESP Bill of Rights?

☒ Support

☐ Oppose

Additional Comments:

Please share how you would use your office to help make the ESP Bill of Rights a reality in the county.

Education Support Professionals (ESPs) are vital to student success and the smooth operation of our schools. As a Board member, I would use my experience working alongside ESps to advocate for the respect, recognition, and support they deserve. I have seen firsthand the important role they play in students' lives, from welcoming them each day and supporting their learning to helping keep them safe. ESps are essential members of our school communities, and schools could not function effectively without them.

Essay Questions

- A. Why are you running for this position? What personal attributes, characteristics, and experiences make you the right candidate for this position?

I'm running for the Allegany County Board of Education because I believe an educator's perspective will strengthen our school system and benefit our students, families, employees, and community. With more than 25 years of experience in education, I understand how decisions made at the Board level impact schools, employees, and student success.

As a former student, parent, teacher, and administrator in Allegany County Public Schools—and now a deeply engaged community member—I care deeply about the future of our district. I have witnessed firsthand the dedication of the professionals who serve our students every day, and I am committed to ensuring their voices are heard and that students remain at the center of every decision.

During my 18 years with Allegany County Public Schools, I served as a teacher at Beall Elementary School, assistant principal at West Side and John Humbird Elementary Schools, and interim principal at West Side Elementary School. These experiences allowed me to build strong, trusting relationships throughout our school communities and gain a deep understanding of the strengths and needs of our district.

In my current role at Western Governors University, I serve as an instructor and faculty coach and have helped develop teacher and leader preparation programs at the university level. These experiences have broadened my understanding of educator development and leadership while reinforcing the importance of preparing future educators to serve students effectively.

I am a trustworthy leader who values listening to and working with people who hold diverse perspectives. I will represent all members of our community and work collaboratively to find solutions that support students and strengthen our schools. As a teacher, I advocated for my classroom family. As a school administrator, I advocated for an entire school community. Now, I want to use my experience, relationships, and leadership to advocate for the entire district and help ensure every student has the opportunity to succeed.

- B. What are the top three things you would like to accomplish in the next four years if you are elected to Board of Education?

Student Well-Being and Mental Health

I would work to expand mental health supports for students, particularly in early childhood programs, and promote consistency in social-emotional learning across grade levels. I would also strengthen collaboration between the school system and community organizations to ensure students and families have access to the resources and services they need.

Safe Learning Environments

Creating and maintaining physically, socially, and emotionally safe environments for students and staff would be a top priority. Students learn best when they feel safe, supported, and connected to their school community.

Opportunities that Promote Innovation and Prepare Students for Successful Futures

I would support opportunities that prepare students for the future workforce, including career and technical education, college readiness, AI literacy, and partnerships that provide real-world learning experiences.

***I would advocate for Allegany County's interests at the state level by working with legislators and state-level committees, such as the Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE). Advocating for the Allegany County School System at the state level will help ensure our schools have the support needed to meet the needs of our students and staff. It will give us a voice in statewide policies that directly impact our schools.

Additional Information

Along with this completed questionnaire, please provide an up-to-date bio or resume as well as a current list of endorsements for this election cycle.

Bio/Resume

List of Endorsements: