

Andrea Chamblee, District 5
HCPSS Board of Ed

Dear Candidate for the Howard County Board of Education,

HoCoJAG is a 501(c)(4) non-profit, non-partisan, independent volunteer group whose mission is to protect the Jewish community through political action and advocacy. HoCoJAG is not affiliated with any political party.

We are inviting you to complete the attached Board of Education Candidate Questionnaire. Your answers will be posted on our website, hocojag.org, and distributed to interested Howard County voters.

We will endorse and support candidates that support HoCoJAG's vision of fostering a Howard County in which Jewish residents are safe, included, and integral to the fabric of the community.

Please submit your completed questionnaire to boesurvey@hocojag.org by March 22, 2024.

1. Should HCPSS adopt the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism?

Yes or No: Please explain your response

The current policy on discrimination gives only one broad definition of what constitutes a protected class. "Religion" is listed in a long series of other groups, which is demonstrably insufficient. That needs to be broken down further. Not only should HCPSS adopt a definition of Antisemitism, they should further define the other groups in that list. This is too important to get wrong. As someone who hasn't experienced injustice and discrimination at the same levels as other community members, I would want to convene stakeholder groups so that any protected class definitions codified by HCPSS policy reflect the specific needs of the people the school system is supposed to protect. If the IHRA definition is the definition that best serves our Jewish students, staff, and families - then that is what should be adopted. But I do think it's important to invite our Jewish families to take it a step further and define for themselves, if they wish to, what antisemitism means in the context of HCPSS - so that they feel confident we're getting it right.

2. Should HCPSS anti-discrimination policies protect Jewish students and staff in the same manner as other protected classes? Yes or No: Please explain your response:

Yes, with two qualifiers. Yes, HCPSS discrimination policies **and implementation procedures** should protect Jewish students and staff in the same manner they are **supposed to** protect other protected classes. I make those qualifications because HCPSS policies don't outline how to do things. The BOE writes the policies and the Superintendent is responsible for the Implementation Procedure. And as it happens, HCPSS doesn't protect any of their protected classes as well as they could or should. It's shameful that we'd ever have any students who don't feel protected at school. Kids can't learn well when they're not safe and comfortable, in a place with people they can trust.

3. Should HCPSS educational equity policies help combat implicit and explicit antisemitic bias?
Yes or No: What specifically would you add to the curriculum:

First and foremost, children need to learn about antisemitism at school. They need to understand the history, why it's so dangerous and what they must do to combat it. They also need to understand that antisemitism continues to be a major problem, even in Howard County. It's also important for all HCPSS students to see Jews represented in all of their classroom materials. Jews have a rich culture and history that is just as relevant to academic growth as anything else. We must do a better job highlighting and celebrating all the contributions Jews have made and continue to make. I think schools have largely abdicated that responsibility to faith communities, and we see where that has gotten us. Broad cultural proficiency has not been prioritized in public education. HCPSS is extremely diverse but proximity to people who are different doesn't automatically create authentic appreciation and understanding. We need to give these children materials and resources deliberately designed to foster inclusivity, acceptance and respect.

Secondly, The HCPSS Educational Equity policy is trying to do way too much. The stated purpose of the policy is noble, but it quickly goes off track from there.

The purpose of this policy is to achieve educational equity by establishing expectations related to the identification and elimination of disparities in education outcomes.

Cultural representation in curriculum and class materials is a necessary part of creating a welcoming and inclusive environment - but this policy purports to focus only on groups that experience disparities in education outcomes. What about cultural representation for groups that don't historically experience disparities in education outcomes? Don't they deserve representation too? There should be three distinct policies: one that is focused on making education more accessible to groups who have historically experienced disparities in opportunity and outcomes, one that emphasizes the importance of cultural representation (that explicitly includes Jewish culture), and one that addresses the need and expectation for students to learn about implicit and explicit bias, antiracism, antisemitism, and their own potential to cause harm.

4. How would you address failure of the HCPSS Office of DEI to create an inclusive environment for Jewish students where they can be valued, respected, and appreciated?

It's much bigger than the DEI office. Since inception, it has largely been their responsibility to identify equity and inclusion based tools and initiatives, and then facilitate professional learning at the school level - thus assisting school staff as they lay a foundation of inclusiveness. It's clear that in many of our schools, that foundation is not solid. This could be because their very small office was not able to spend enough time helping all schools improve their climate and culture. It could be a reflection of school administrators not prioritizing the work. It could be the growing pains of a relatively new department whose original leader left for another job, leaving them leaderless for a long time, then adjusting to a new leader in Ms. Jones. There are a variety of reasons why the HCPSS DEI office has not been as effective as we need them to be. I would want to address failure to meet expectations by first determining why. Do they need more representation from other cultures in their department?

One of the biggest disappointments has been the slow roll out of their hate-bias reporting capabilities. The DEI office came to the Community Advisory Counsel in the fall and gave a presentation on a whole new hate-bias reporting program. It still has not been launched, which is a terrible shame. It's expected to go live next school year. Late is better than never, but not having it ready this year really disenfranchised students, particularly Jewish students.

It's important to note that the DEI office isn't the only department responsible for ensuring our students can learn in a safe, accepting environment. The office of Program Innovation and Student Well-Being has a large role to play in this as well. That is the department that receives and investigates escalated bullying reports and they are ultimately responsible for executing the directives in the Bullying, Harassment, Intimidation and Cyberbullying implementation procedure.

At the end of the day, it all comes down to priorities. Things that HCPSS prioritizes receive attention. Things that they don't, don't. I'm going to do everything I can to shift HCPSS' priorities from the top down. HCPSS really blew it this year.

5. Should HCPSS policies regarding Student Expression supersede policies guaranteeing students a Safe, Supportive, and Non-Discriminatory environment?

Yes or No: Please explain your response:

No. What has happened in the schools since October 7, 2023 has been so harmful and it's going to take a long time for communities to recover from the damage that was done in the name of free expression. I will work tirelessly to not only keep your children safe moving forward, but I will also work with the community to identify paths towards healing and regaining trust that was lost. We can't pretend these things didn't happen. We need to learn from the mistakes of our past so they aren't repeated. HCPSS had/has a responsibility to respond vigilantly when communities are in crisis and I'm not aware that they did anything except allow it to get worse. There is a line where expression ceases to be free and instead takes the form of abuse. HCPSS failed to identify and hold that line.

6. HCPSS faculty and students have held walkouts, rallies, and petitions against Israel and have pressured students to sign, attend, and/or participate. This has led to discrimination, bullying, harassment, and intimidation of Jewish students. What will you do to protect Jewish students?:

Policy 9020 States:

Assembly: Students have the right to assemble. Students have the right to freely choose the subject and form of a peaceful demonstration. Schools may set reasonable limits as to the time, place, and manner in which students and student groups may assemble, as long as those restrictions advance legitimate educational goals.

Symbolic Expression: Students have a right to display symbolic forms of expression as long as the display does not demean an identifiable person or group or are reasonably perceived as promoting hatred, intimidation, or harassment. (Policy 1060 Bullying, Cyberbullying, Harassment, and Intimidation)

As with everything, policies are only as good as their implementation. Administrators are responsible for using good judgment and for prioritizing the safety and well-being of students. The superintendent

is responsible for holding school administrators accountable when they don't follow policy. There were major accountability issues under the previous Superintendent. He wasn't willing to discipline administrators who violated policies or used terribly poor judgment in areas where policy gave them discretion. The new superintendent must be someone who is willing to stand up for our students and protect them instead of protecting his own staff. And in an effort to proactively safeguard against school management who may put administrators above students, the Board of Education may need to revise HCPSS policies in such a way that sufficiently limits the amount of discretion we give to schools with regard to activities where there's a high likelihood of harm. Quite a bit of the harm that was done in our schools after October 7 was entirely preventable. Safety is my #1 concern. It is at the top of my campaign platform and the reason I am running.

I confirm that the responses provided here are my official positions in seeking an elected position on the Howard County Board of Education and I understand that HoCoJAG reserves the right to share my responses, or my decision not to respond, with interested parties.

Signature: Andrea Chamblee

Date: March 22, 2024