

Questionnaire Response

To boesurvey@hocojag.org <boesurvey@hocojag.org>

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: **Yes.**

Please explain your response:

I think the IHRA definition of antisemitism that uses the phrase, "a hatred of Jews" focuses on completely indefensible statements or actions whereas other definitions describe it in more general terms of "hostility to, prejudice towards or discrimination against Jews." While these latter descriptions can certainly constitute antisemitism, when actions or words rise to the level of "hatred of Jews," the IHRA definition leaves no doubt that such action or statements are antisemitic.

2. Should HCPSS anti-discrimination polices protect Jewish students and staff in the same manner as other protected classes?

Yes or No: **Absolutely.**

Please explain your response:

For so long as HCPSS continues to focus on protected class identity Jewish students must be protected in the same manner as other protected classes. The current system of providing preferential treatment for certain groups is based on the belief that by doing so, it will make other groups more aware of and accepting of their differences. But children almost always realize the unfairness inherent in "picking favorites." Rather than promoting acceptance, this practice often produces the opposite result.

3. Should HCPSS educational equity policies help combat implicit and explicit antisemitic bias?

Yes or No: **Yes, but...**

What specifically would you add to the curriculum:

The (to me) surprising expression of antisemitism occasioned as a result of the Israeli/Hamas war reminds me that recent generations of students have little, if any, experiential knowledge of the atrocities human beings are capable of inflicting on one another or that this happens in countries across the globe. Nor does the public school curriculum make an effort to draw any moral distinction between what are clearly actions of evil and normal standards of human behavior. I would like to see an effort by the school system to educate our students on the fact that such atrocities do occur and enable them to judge – to make distinctions—between the kind of violence we see here in America and the kind of violence that occurs all too frequently in countries that decide to “cleanse” their population of a certain class (often based on religion) of people. The Holocaust only became clear to me when I read a novel that brought to life what the Nazis did to an entire population of their Jewish citizens.

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?

I don't believe the Office of DEI can create an environment free from any sort of bias. Students are people, and unfortunately, people aren't always nice. The best way to eliminate most antisemitism, anti-black, anti-gay, anti LGBTQ+, etc. bigotry is for the school to consistently impose quick and certain disciplinary measures that actually work to dissuade and prevent students from engaging and/or reengaging in such behavior.

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

Yes or No: Yes, but . . .

Please explain your response:

The tension between our constitutional right to freedom of speech and providing a safe environment has been and continues to be constant challenge. For every government act taken to ensure our safety, a minute bit of our liberty dies. Freedom of speech is possibly the most important right guaranteed to us by the constitution. It is intended to protect the speech we *don't* like, something that this generation does not seem to understand. However, speech that rises to the level that tends to urge action can be limited, and in a public school, limits on speech can be broader. Children are not adults, and hateful speech can be far more damaging to a young person, required to be in the school and around the student(s) who say these things. In schools, hateful speech is bullying, and HCPSS need to do a better job of preventing this type of behavior.

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?

Frankly, I have been appalled by the widespread attitude expressing empathy with the Palestinians and antipathy toward Israel, particularly among students. I've watched as a number of students have come to

the BOE and spoken at the public forum chastising the board for not taking a position in support of Palestine calls for a complete ceasefire and branding the Israeli Jews as the aggressors. At the very least, I would speak up and call out any instance of anti-Jewish bias, and to the extent I have the power to do so, would hold principals accountable for preventing this from happening in their schools.

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: Trent Kittleman Date: March 22, 2024