
Questions for all candidates

Candidate Opening Statement and Introduction

Please introduce yourself and explain why you want to serve on the PWC School Board, what you believe qualifies you to represent your district as a school board member, and what issues you'd focus on if elected.

My name is Lori Dolieslager and I am seeking the Brentsville District seat on the PWC School Board. I am a wife and mother of four amazing children. My oldest is a sophomore at Osbourn Park High School. I have two at Marsteller Middle in 8th and 7th grades and a 4th grader at Victory Elementary. My children have attended Brentsville District schools since we moved to Bristow in 2002 from the Eastern side of the county. When my youngest child went to kindergarten, I began substitute teaching. I have taken many positions in both elementary and middle schools and most recently taught 4th grade in a long term position. I am in the process of gaining my K - 6 teaching certification and currently teach 5th and 6th grade DC charter school students online for K12, Inc. My classroom and online experience offer me an insight that current Board members do not have nor can draw upon when making important decisions directly affecting our children and those who serve them.

I have also served in many capacities as a volunteer. For five years, I served on the Superintendent's Advisory Council on Instruction. One responsibility of that position is to report information back to my children's elementary school's Advisory Council, which I have served as Chairman and Vice Chairman. I have served on several boundary committees and Administrative hiring panels, as well as assisted in the founding of a PTO at a new elementary school. These positions have helped me gain a better understanding of the school system as a whole and the ways the different departments and organizations must work together to be successful.

There are several issues I will focus on while representing the Brentsville District. First, I will encourage development of a strong STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) curriculum at all levels to prepare our students for the 21st century workforce they will be entering. We can and need to rise above the SOL benchmark only approach to prepare our children for the post secondary education that many jobs in our area require. Second, we need to remain competitive in the Northern Virginia region as Prince William County's largest employer. Our compensation packages must at least match surrounding counties to gain and retain highly qualified staff. Training and recruiting teachers is expensive, but losing them to surrounding jurisdictions is even more costly. Next, I will focus on reducing class sizes, beginning in the primary years. The importance of a strong foundation in the "three R's" means less remediation and intervention later. Lastly, I will focus on being fiscally responsible as we manage growth even in a tough economic climate and keep individual students and families' best interests at the forefront of any decision. This includes utilizing building space fully across the county, not just our district and eliminating costly double busing and other expenses associated with boundary changes. I will focus on creating feeder patterns so that children will move from elementary to middle and middle to high schools with their peers.

District Administration

1. The PWC School Board's major function is to provide the policies that guide the school district. The Superintendent is hired by the school board to implement the policies handed down to him / her from the school board and is accountable to the school board.
 - a. Do you believe that the PWC School Board is exercising an appropriate level of control over the school district? If not, what do you believe needs to change?

I do not believe that the School Board has exercised the appropriate level of control over the school district on many occasions. There needs to be more accountability by the individuals who provide the presentations, data, and analysis to the Board. I feel the best attribute a School Board member can have is the ability to ask the right questions. When citizens bring forth information that is dissimilar than the data provided by staff, it is the responsibility of the Board member to serve due diligence and seek out information and not rely solely on staff for all information.

- b. The Superintendent's contract will be up for review soon. How would you rate his performance?

My experience with the current Superintendent is witnessing School Board meetings and several meetings over the years such as Superintendent's Advisory Council meetings or School of Excellence presentations. With that being said, I believe there is much room for improvement in our schools, but I would need to wait to review his contract, goals and objectives, and adherence to plans set forth by the current board.

2. District officials frequently make presentations about the effectiveness of programs they've implemented. Those presentations are supposed to be objective and provided in a timely manner, yet the Office of Accountability reports to the Superintendent who has a vested interest in presenting the results of programs he and his staff have implemented in a positive light.
 - a. Do you believe that it is appropriate for the Office of Accountability to report to the Superintendent? Please explain your reasoning.

No, I do not believe it is appropriate for the Office of Accountability to report to the Superintendent. There should be an independent party or consultant who reports the findings/facts without bias or subjectivity. One of the major disappointments I have as well as many constituents is the lack of transparency, full disclosure, and truth. If the person making the presentation is the same person who implemented it and they also review and report on the findings, there is a huge conflict of interest with no segregation of duty which lends itself to misrepresentation and collusion.

- b. Do you believe that school board members should accept the assertions of district officials without question or do you believe that school board members should view that information with a degree of skepticism? What steps would you take to verify the completeness and accuracy of information presented by the school district?

Absolutely ask questions and demand that due process and due diligence take place. Facts and figures need to be proven, justified, and questioned and then be used as benchmarks to measure the performance of the people submitting the information.

- c. How would you respond if you were aware that the information presented by the district to the public and school board was misleading or inaccurate or if the district wasn't providing the information in a timely manner?

I believe in full disclosure and transparency. A citizen should **never** have to exercise their right to gain information under the Freedom of Information Act, as it should be readily available. Knowingly and willfully misleading the board or misrepresenting data to sway the board, constituents and citizens is grounds for immediate dismissal and possible further action.

Budget and Transparency

1. Determining budgetary priorities for PWCS is a significant responsibility of the school board with funds allocated to PWCS from the Board of County Supervisors and other sources.
 - a. Assume our funding allocations result in a projected budget shortfall. Would you request an increase in property taxes to cover the projected shortfall or would you recommend cuts to programs? If you would recommend cuts or if your request for increased taxes was rejected by the BOCS, what program or programs would you cut or eliminate and why?

During a previous budget cycle, as a parent, I did lobby the BOCS for the tax rate to be set at one penny higher to ensure proper funding for Prince William County Schools. In my school district, this meant the difference of \$20 - \$30 per home over the course of a year. I am normally a conservative who would not be for a tax increase but I also do not support the notion of school funding being directly tied to property and home values. I would consider and look for other revenue sources to ensure adequate funding. I do believe that budget cuts should always be a focus regardless of the state of the economy. As for expense cuts, I would question personnel and departments that seem to be over staffed, with job performance and accountability at the forefront of my discussions. I would go line by line through the budget questioning special interest items that do not benefit the majority of students.

- b. True fiscal responsibility isn't just what you do when money is tight, but what you do when you have a surplus of funds. Assume PWCS received a larger allocation than anticipated. If it was a one time allocation of funds, how would you allocate them and why? If the increased allocation appeared to be the result of an improving economy and was likely to be ongoing, how would you allocate those funds and why?

If there were a surplus of funds that was not earmarked to be spent in a certain manner, I would address our reserves first ensuring that we have a "rainy day" fund. If it was determined that the money were to be spent, a one time surplus of funds would be allocated to make certain all schools have the same technologies and amenities to move

toward providing every student with the same opportunities. If it was a sustainable source of revenue, I would recommend teacher compensation be made more competitive with surrounding school districts while committing to a rollout of smaller class sizes.

2. PWCS takes great pride in the fact that our published cost per pupil is lower than surrounding jurisdictions, but some items are excluded from that calculation and there is no real industry standard for how that figure is derived. Should our published cost per pupil reflect actual total outlays, including debt service costs and transfers to the teacher retirement system, or should some items be excluded from that calculation and why?

We should not take pride in or publish that our cost per pupil is lower. I fail to see this as beneficial. If the Prince William County School's motto is a *World Class Education*, it would make sense to state and publish that we use all available resources to migrate toward that vision. If it is a requirement to publish the cost per pupil, then by all means all expenses associated should be in the equation, again referring to my earlier point of full disclosure and transparency.

Relations with Teachers

1. Many teachers have expressed concerns that they are being bullied by their school administrators to support and implement programs that are backed by district officials even when they believe those program will undermine student learning. Many of our teachers believe that they no longer have the authority to teach their subjects in the manner they believe is best. Do you believe these concerns are valid and, if so, what do you believe should to be done to address them?

Teachers should have the flexibility and support to teach the subject matter in a way that yields the best results, comprehension, and understanding. The fact that the students are learning should be more important than how they are learning. The teacher has the most interaction with the students and their opinion and professionalism should be given more weight in the process.

2. Many of our teachers have expressed that they fear retaliation from their school administration and district administration if they speak out against programs the district or school is implementing. Would you consider creating some sort of whistle-blower program to protect teachers should they choose to speak out against programs the district or their school administration is planning?

Yes. Punishing a teacher for speaking their mind, professionally, is a Draconian practice. Creating policies and procedures for how teachers can express their concerns would create avenues for them to be truthful and not fear repercussions for their professional opinion. Such a system is regularly practiced in the private sector and there is no reason this practice can not be implemented in Prince William County Schools. In fact, PWCS being at the forefront of a procedure such as this could make great advances in the county's recruitment and retention efforts.

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3. PWC teachers make about the regional average in salaries but our benefits appear to be above average. It has been several years since our teachers received salary increases and benefits have been reduced. We are hiring an increasing number of new teachers each year and retiring more experienced teachers. Do you believe that these are problems and, if so, how would you address them? Would you ask the BOCS to raise property taxes to pay for an increase in teacher salaries and / or benefits?

I support whatever it takes to retain qualified and experienced teachers. Recruiting, hiring and training of employees is costly. We must remain competitive to protect our investment in our highly qualified employees. We cannot allow PWCS to be the training ground for teachers to gain experience and then move to surrounding counties with more competitive pay and benefits. With that being said, I am not a proponent for raising taxes. However, as I stated earlier, I also do not support the notion of school funding being directly tied to property and home values. I would consider and look for other revenue sources to ensure adequate funding. If it were necessary, I would address the BOCS to reexamine our revenue sharing policy if funding were not adequate to meet the school system's budget requirements.

Redistricting and School Construction / Renovation

With the rapid housing development we saw in recent years overcrowding of schools is an issue – especially in the western end of the county. We're opening a number of new schools in the next few years, which means students' are going to be redistricted. As the focus from a construction standpoint has been on new schools in the west end, a perception has developed that schools in the east end are being neglected.

1. Parents currently serve on the committees to redistrict Elementary and Middle Schools, but not High Schools. Do you believe that parents should serve on the High School redistricting committees?

Parents should absolutely be the ones to serve on boundary committees for high schools. The current policy states that "due to their highly complex nature, boundaries for high schools shall be developed in the most appropriate manner as determined by the Superintendent." I believe this is suggesting that as parents and community members, we are unable to handle the complexity of creating fair, logical and objective boundaries. Instead, the committee is made up of staff members who get to create their vision of what the boundaries should be. In the latest high school boundary plan, there were only four staff members making up the boundary committee. Of the four members, two of the men lived in the affected area and one was a former principal of one of the affected high schools which created a direct conflict of interest. Very little, if any, community input was used to digress from their original plan. I believe that with staff's guidance, parents and members of the community are intelligent enough to collaborate and work through any complexities that may arise in a high school boundary.

2. Rapid growth and new schools means students have to move to different schools – sometimes several times in their academic careers. Should attention be paid to keeping

students together from Kindergarten to graduation by taking “feeder” patterns into account during redistricting?

I am very much for creating "feeder" patterns, which is the natural flow of elementary students moving with their peer group to middle school and then onto high school with their middle school peers. Many school divisions across the country boast of having developed feeder patterns for their students, which research shows has many positive benefits. Based on all boundary decisions by the current board, it is apparent that this has not been a priority here in Prince William County. There are pockets all over the county where elementary schools are divided among several middle schools and middle schools are divided into multiple high schools. Over the last few years in the Brentsville District for example, Lake Manassas was moved to Reagan Middle School in Dominion Valley but will be the only community not attending Battlefield High School. Newcastle Village, a section of Braemar, was moved to Bristow Run this year (after the rest of Braemar was moved to T. Clay Wood) and will be the only Bristow Run students to not attend Gainesville Middle School with their peers. Marsteller students are divided among three different high schools. With the growth in our area, I do understand it is not always possible to create perfect feeder patterns, but I do believe it should be one of the guidelines used by boundary committees.

3. How would you address the perception that schools in the east end of the county are being neglected because so much attention is being paid to new school construction which is primarily in the west end of the county?

To ensure that all students have the same opportunities, funds should be allocated regardless of location to make sure all schools have the same technologies and amenities. I will not engage in the East vs. West type banter and I will work with my fellow board members using budget analysis and data to show where allocations should be made. While schools in the East may not be brand new, there are many positive attributes of living in established communities where schools are not overcrowded and boundaries are not frequently redrawn. I believe we have one county, one budget, not East vs. West.

Curriculum and Instruction

Several years ago PWCS adopted and mandated a controversial instructional program for K – 5 mathematics called TERC or Math Investigations despite the fact that the program was not recommended by the Va. DOE for use as a K – 5 series. There were two major controversies with this program: the instructional approach which is referred to as constructivist, standards based, or reform math; and, central control over instruction as opposed to site or teacher driven instruction. PWCS is currently considering math textbooks again and the final decision regarding new math instructional programs / materials will rest with the newly elected school board.

1. Math Investigations was not reviewed by the Va. DOE for this review cycle and is not on the list of state recommended textbooks PWCS is considering, though we can consider it if the textbooks recommended by the Va. DOE are deemed inadequate. Do you believe it is appropriate for the district to select and use a non-state recommended textbook as its primary instructional material?

I believe this is a case by case scenario and should be addressed by topic with the textbook adoption committee members tasked with adopting the most appropriate textbooks. If all of the textbooks recommended by the Virginia Department of Education (Va. DOE) were deemed inadequate and the committee recommended a textbook not on the state recommended list, all measures should be taken to research the recommended material. School divisions currently using the material can be questioned on the effectiveness of the textbooks, public opinions or research on the text should be considered and current employees should be given the opportunity to use the material with students. Many times a textbook is used as a supplementary guide to what is taught in the classroom. In the case of Math Investigations, PWCS simply did not just choose a textbook; PWCS chose primary instructional material and new methods of teaching.

2. Do you believe that instruction should be centrally controlled with district mandated materials and lesson pacing or that teachers should be given the authority to select and use any state / district approved instructional material on a pace that matches his / her students' needs?

I believe that teachers should be given the authority to select and use any district approved material to teach the standards in which they are tasked with teaching. The classroom teacher is the most knowledgeable of their students' abilities and learning styles and they should be given the freedom to teach their students as best suited individually. The lesson pacing guides can be used by teachers to benchmark their own instructional speed and team meetings can be beneficial in making sure no class lags too far behind the recommended instructional pace.

3. Do you believe that the instructional approach Investigations follows improved student learning and that the approach should be continued in Elementary School and expanded into Middle School and High School?

I believe that children learn by many different methods. One method of teaching something may result in understanding in some, but a different method reaches the rest. I want to first state that I am not in favor of Math Investigations. There are some redeeming qualities of this instruction type and I do believe that the whole experience of Investigations has shown some teachers that there are ways to "play with numbers" and teach math differently allowing the students to discover math principles on their own. I do, however, believe it lacks the required memorization of algorithms required to advance in math. By the end of 2nd grade, a student should be able to recall basic math addition and subtraction problems without having to use cubes, fingers, or manipulatives. Multiplication facts should come easy to fourth graders without using arrays or grids so that they can begin to master division. By not being able to recall basic math facts quickly, solving multi-digit problems becomes convoluted and time consuming. The multi-step approach taken in Investigations leaves room for error and makes moving on to more challenging algebraic equations difficult. I think that we need to have a blended approach to math to reach the many different learning styles and that we should learn from the mistakes that were made by buying into a whole new program and rolling it out on the same group of students year after year.

In response to concerns that the Math Investigations program was inadequately preparing their children for higher level Mathematics, parents requested that they be given the choice of “opting out” of the district mandated program. This would have forced schools to provide an alternate instructional program to those children whose parents “opted them out”. The school board voted this request down in a 4 – 4 split.

4. Should parents be given the choice of “opting out” of controversial instructional programs mandated by the school district? Please explain your reasoning.

I think my issue with the "opting out" decision voted on by the board is that there was no stance taken on whether a mistake was made or not by buying into the entire Math Investigations curriculum and rolling it out on the same group of students year after year. The bottom line is that teachers and administrators had already been using a blended approach in the classrooms. The teachers could identify what was lacking in the material and were supplementing their own material or using previous textbooks to meet the Standards of Learning for their grade level. I do believe that parents should have a say in curriculum and instructional material but did not agree in creating two types of math instruction in our schools and classrooms, which in turn created an additional tier of differentiated teaching for teachers.

Curriculum and Instruction

Ever since the VA DOE mandated the Standards of Learning (SOLs), PWCS has maintained that the objective of instruction in our schools was to exceed the expectations set forth in the SOLs. District officials in Mathematics and English / Language Arts have proposed that the SOLs be the extent of instruction in our schools for 2011 to 2017 and that the objective of instruction in PWCS be designed to ensure the highest proficiency rates on the SOL exams. Increasing the percentage of students achieving an advanced score on the SOL has been characterized by district officials as “icing” and not the objective of instruction in our schools.

5. Do you believe that the objective of instruction in PWCS should be to meet or exceed the state SOLs? If you believe that PWCS should strive to exceed the SOLs, what would you do to ensure that instruction in our schools does exceed the SOLs when district officials have stated that the objective of instruction is to meet the SOLs?

PWCS’s objective is to create a World Class school system. The demographics of the majority of Virginia are not the same as they are here in Northern Virginia. Ranking all states, the state of Virginia is 4th in the number of high tech jobs and 3rd in the number of scientists, engineers and mathematicians and the large majority are concentrated right here in Northern Virginia. For our students to compete for these post secondary jobs in our area, we need to accept the state Standards of Learning as a foundation and build from there. We should exceed the SOL standards and create our own standards based on what a World Class education entails.

6. Do you believe that the needs of our advanced learners, those students who are capable of achieving an advanced score on the SOL exams, should be a priority in the district? Do you

believe that their needs are being adequately addressed now and will be adequately addressed as our instructional focus is on achieving the highest "pass rates"?

Highest "pass rates" and enrichment of advanced learners, unfortunately do not go together in today's high stakes testing environment. No Child Left Behind, as written, has left us with unattainable goals and an inability to focus on advanced learners. In sports, if we see a talented young athlete, we fast track them into travel teams and extensive training in an effort to hone their talent. The same should be done with students identified as advanced. We need to be developing their creativity and critical thinking skills, and in turn, developing our future leaders, scientists, engineers and mathematicians. Surrounding school districts have Gifted and Talented Elementary Schools and what we have with Start for K - 3 and Signet one day a week simply does not compare.

7. One of the biggest complaints about the SOLs is that we teach to the test. Instruction in classrooms on content routinely ends one or more months before the state exams and consists of reviewing questions from prior exams rather than reviewing the content being tested. Once exams are over students spend their days watching movies and playing games. Do you believe this is a problem and what do you believe can or should be done to rectify this?

I do believe the amount of instruction time lost to the SOL preparation, reviewing and test taking is a problem. This past year, three schools in our county were given waivers from SOL testing for three years based on continually receiving high pass rates. The first thing that came to my mind when I heard this is the invaluable amount of extra instruction time these students will receive at these schools. Instruction can go right up to the end of the year and not be disrupted by the stress of test taking. I would love to track these children to see what benefits would come from an additional 6 - 8 weeks of instruction. As far as watching movies and playing games after the tests are completed, I would hope that this was not the case and must be addressed by the administration. A good teacher would continue to teach, even though the results of what they were teaching would not be reflected in their test scores.
