



## 2014 Frederick County Board of Education Candidate Questionnaire

CANDIDATE: \_\_\_\_\_ [Richard S. Vallaster III](#) \_\_\_\_\_

OFFICE SOUGHT: \_\_\_\_\_ [Board of Education](#) \_\_\_\_\_

CAMPAIGN ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_ [P.O. Box 3123 / Frederick, MD 21705](#) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

PHONE NUMBER(S): \_\_\_\_\_ [Campaign Line 240-397-9344](#) \_\_\_\_\_ Cell: [240-446-1640](#) \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_ [rich@FriendsOfRichVallaster.com](mailto:rich@FriendsOfRichVallaster.com) \_\_\_\_\_

WEBSITE: \_\_\_\_\_ [www.FriendsOfRichVallaster.com](http://www.FriendsOfRichVallaster.com) \_\_\_\_\_

CAMPAIGN TREASURER \_\_\_\_\_ [Brenda Reese](#) \_\_\_\_\_

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

**CANDIDATE SIGNATURE:** \_\_\_\_\_ **DATE SUBMITTED:** [3/6/14](#) \_\_\_\_\_

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

## Frederick County Board of Education Candidate Biography

### ***Education:***

Mount St. Mary's University  
Emmitsburg, MD  
Master's of Business Administration (M.B.A.)

Bridgewater College  
Bridgewater, VA  
B.S., Sociology & Communications - cum laude

### ***Employment History:***

eduWeb Conference  
Co-Chair and Partner  
2005–Present  
Frederick, MD

Creosote Affects  
Partner and Co-Founder  
2003–2013  
Emmitsburg, MD

Mount St. Mary's University  
Associate Director of Communications & Webmaster  
2001–2003  
Emmitsburg, MD

Grove Public Relations  
Graphic Designer, Website Developer, PR Manager  
1999–2001  
Frederick, MD

### ***School Involvement:***

St. John's Episcopal School – Board of Trustees (2012-Present)

Guest Lecturer

Bridgewater College

Lasell College

Virginia Tech

Bridgewater College (1999–2010)

Alumni Association Board Member

Board of Directors, Young Alumni Association

President of Annual Fund Executive Committee

Marketing Advisory Committee

I have collaborated with some of the most well known colleges/universities and prestigious boarding and independent schools in the country as an education consultant.

### ***Educational Speaking Engagements***

The Association of Boarding School (TABS) Conference

Greater Baltimore Independent School Parents Network

Association of Independent School Admission Professionals - (AISAP Conference)

Pacific Northwest Association of Independent Schools - (PNAIS) Conference

National Association for College Admission Counseling - (NACAC) Conference

Pennsylvania Association for College Admission Counseling - (PACAC) Conference

Southern Association for College Admission Counseling - (SACAC) Conference

Potomac and Chesapeake Association for College Admission Counseling Conference-  
(PCACAC)

Council for Advancement and Support of Education - (CASE D1 Conference)

eduWeb Conference

### ***Organizations/Community Involvement:***

Frederick Festival of the Arts (2009–2011) Board of Directors

CEFF – Cultural Events for Educating Frederick (1999–2005) Board of Directors

GFAF – Greater Frederick County Advertising Federation (1997–2004) Board of Directors

OSE – City of Frederick Office of Special Events (1999–2005)

In The Street – Chairman of the Board

Holiday's In Frederick – Board Member & Volunteer

Summer Concert Series – Board Member & Volunteer

Fourth of July in Frederick – Volunteer

**1. *What is your vision for the future of Frederick County Public Schools? As a member of the Board of Education how will you support this vision?***

FCPS must continue to evolve and meet the needs of students today and in the future. As an entire organization, FCPS must think generatively to move beyond the day-to-day and solve our challenges and capitalize on our opportunities.

Goals in supporting this vision:

1. Thinking generatively and strategically.
2. Trusting and better listening to the talented workforce FCPS has in-place.
3. Making decisions based on data not gut or emotional response to public outcry.
4. Regularly meet with FCTA, FASSE and FCASA to gauge sentiment/support and ask for advice and research on current and upcoming issues.
5. Educating the general public (and other elected and influential people) about the many challenges and opportunities facing FCPS.

**2. *For the last five years, the county government has funded the school system at Maintenance of Effort (MOE) levels, even in the years county revenues increased. MOE is the lowest level of county education funding allowed by law and does not take into account inflation, unfunded mandates or other increased costs to education. FCTA has been very clear that MOE funding over this extended period is not adequate to meet the needs of our students. Do you believe MOE funding for Frederick County Public Schools is sufficient or do you think additional funding is necessary? Explain.***

Funding the BOE at MOE is **not** acceptable. The BOCC continues to maintain its lack of desire to discuss (beyond stunt politics) anything beyond maintenance of effort. Interestingly, the BOCC has publically stated the county needed to reward its workforce for surviving the same “hard times” as FCPS has.

In every sector and industry, costs have increased and organizations have worked diligently to contain costs and locate savings wherever possible. FCPS has continued to make decisions that have least impacted the classroom. I personally feel few outside the organization and those who follow it know the sacrifice everyone has felt. Without the ability for FCPS to adjust taxes to increase the budget, the BOE will be beholden to the BOCC. With this year’s election, my hope is to better educate and align my allegiance to those candidates who support funding above MOE. If the election results mirror the last election, the BOE will have to work even harder to reposition the thinking of the BOCC.

3. ***Recruiting and retaining high-quality employees is essential to improved student achievement. It is made more difficult in Frederick County by our proximity to higher paying school systems and the high cost of owning a home here. What would you do to help the school system recruit and retain high quality and effective employees?***

The lifeblood of any organization is its workforce. With FCPS currently ranked nearly last in starting salary and low in many other metrics, recruitment and retention will continue to be an issue. Having been an employer and elected to the administrators affairs committee at a University, I personally know the struggle of recruiting talented individuals when peer organizations or companies can offer more. We must continue to lobby for more competitive pay along with other non-salary benefits that will attract and retain high quality employees.

4. ***Adequate healthcare and other benefits are crucial in the recruitment and retention of high quality and effective employees. The joint FCPS/Employee Insurance Council has worked collaboratively to ensure the financial health and long term viability of FCPS employee benefits. What recommendations would you make to continue to provide quality health care benefits to employees while keeping the costs affordable to employees and the Board?***

Having personally negotiated healthcare for my own company, I understand the complex and confusing maze it can be. The impacts of the affordable healthcare act on organizations small and large has been sizeable in many cases. In today's market place, healthcare is often second to salary in-terms of importance to attracting and retaining employees. Having a healthy workforce is also critical in education. The entire FCPS school system must continue to regularly negotiate with providers, search for efficiencies, educate the workforce on how to maintain skyrocketing costs and offer programs and services to improve the overall health of the employees to maintain affordable care. Health care is dual responsibility of the individual and the employer.

5. ***What is your opinion of negotiating multiyear bargaining agreements on salary and benefits? How would you ensure funding from the county government if this approach is used?***

Multi-year bargaining often provides budgetary predictability desired by many fiscal conservatives. Give the current BOCC, the lack of flexibility may further bind FCTA to unfavorable conditions. The public will have to be further educated on these policies to gain more public support. Few in the general populous understand the benefits of such a negotiation. A more dynamic and agile process may be more prudent given the uncertainty in market conditions. The approach to this position can only be settled following the election.

6. *Teachers do not have adequate time to meet the increasing demands and constant changes that are the result of education reforms enacted at the federal, state and local level. Implementation of the Common Core State Standards, changes to teacher evaluation, restructuring of the middle school schedule and changes to elementary school grading and report cards, for example, have put tremendous stress on teachers and students. What ideas do you have to streamline, prioritize and reduce the constantly changing demands put on teachers? How should the BOE assess the effectiveness of existing programs and new initiatives?*

As in any industry, change is inevitable. Schools across the country are facing the same challenges. Unfortunately for FCPS, the budget constraints and MOE funding have further impacted Frederick County. As stated previously, the BOE must turn to recommendations of its teachers and staff **first**. National research data along with feedback from other educators is critical. I, along with the general public are not educators by trade and **must** rely and gain more input from our internal audiences. Opinions in open forums and “hunches” based on random samplings are not acceptable to make an informed decision at the board level. The BOE must provide ample flexibility, support, professional development and any assistance needed to implement the programs. Equipping teachers is not a luxury it is a necessity.

7. *Please mark the box that best reflects your position.*

POLICY ISSUE	FCTA position	Support	Oppose
Private/home school vouchers or tuition tax credits	Oppose		X
Differentiated pay for hard to staff positions	Oppose	X*	
Merit pay for teachers and administrators	Oppose	X+	
Taxing authority for the Board of Education	No Position	X	

**Comments:**

\*Our goal is to educate students to the best of our ability. Having positions not staffed only provides a disservice to our population. Differentiated pay for hard to staff positions I support in theory. It has been my experience in education that this policy is not practical for many reasons including the inequity it can create.

+ Having explored merit based pay at a university, I support the theory but not in practice. Many school systems have attached merit pay to student learning incomes and had a reverse effect by manipulation of numbers and stresses caused in delivering artificial results.

8. *In spite of an accelerated building schedule, many of our schools remain overcrowded. Enrollment data indicates 13 of the county's 66 public schools are exceeding full capacity. This includes; Centerville Elementary, at 140 percent; Hillcrest Elementary, 130 percent; Urbana Middle, 128 percent; Tuscarora Elementary, 120 percent; Yellow Springs Elementary, 112 percent; North Frederick Elementary and Whittier Elementary, 111 percent; Waverley Elementary, 109 percent; Urbana Elementary, 108 percent; Oakdale Middle, 105 percent; Deer Crossing and New Market Elementary, 104 percent; and Monocacy Elementary, 102 percent (source: Frederick News Post, October 7, 2013). What are your ideas to provide adequate space for all Frederick's school children? What ideas do you have to ensure the adequate use of existing school space to avoid overcrowding in some schools while unused classrooms exist at other schools?*

In recent years, the BOCC has continued to loosen restrictions, taxes and impact fees on builders. With the exponential growth the county has seen, the schools system's budget has not been increased to match the population. Similar to an unfunded mandate, the current policies set have left FCPS with few choices. Redistricting to the less crowded northern county schools is unfeasible and unpopular. A continued effort of public outreach and education is necessary to better understand how growth impacts our school system. This education will hopefully impact voters choice and sway BOCC opinion.

9. *Inequities in technology, space and functionality exist between new and newly renovated buildings versus older buildings. How do you see the need to renovate older schools fitting into the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)? How should the renovation needs of older buildings be prioritized?*

Deferred maintenance is costly approach to budget savings. Having witnessed many televised board meetings, the proverbial "squeaky wheel" gets politicians attention. A more strategic and equitable approach must be developed. The board must stand strong behind decisions that will generate the greatest impact on the education, safety and well-being of our children first. The renovation needs must not be swayed by politics and be based on strategic planning.

***10. Technology improvements continue to be a need in the school system. School technology positions, critical to staff training and technology upkeep, have not been sufficiently funded. Adequate funding for technology infrastructure, hardware and software has not been provided as the school budget has been squeezed. Do you believe FCPS needs to commit to a more aggressive plan to improve technology in our schools? What will you do to advocate for increased technology funding, especially for the necessary staff to ensure that technology is used effectively?***

Technology is paramount in many parents' minds. Many independent schools are piloting or implementing one-to-one programs with tablets. Technology at all levels (including training) must be pursued and funded more aggressively. Few people understand how quickly technology is changing in education. Without a continual push for technology, our students will fall behind at every level.

***11. FCTA and the Frederick Association of School Support Employees (FASSE) oppose the outsourcing and privatization of jobs currently done by the dedicated education support professionals of FCPS. Do you think it is appropriate for the school system to privatize aspects of their operations? Under what circumstances, if any, would you support privatizing or outsourcing work currently being done by FCPS staff?***

In times of budget crisis, organizations have looked to outsource or privatize to save money. It has been in my experience that often times the short term savings are eclipsed by the long-term expense and hassle. That being said, it is unreasonable to think that any organization can effectively and efficiently handle every possible task. FCPS must remain vigilant in maintaining the internal organization but agile enough to gain benefits for the entire organization if necessary. Each case must be carefully evaluated.

***12. The School Board is responsible for determining the FCPS curriculum as well as approving all textbooks and supporting instructional materials. What is your view of the current FCPS curriculum? What changes, if any, will you advocate in regards to the curriculum? Will you advocate for changes to the current process of textbook and supporting material selection and approval?***

At this point I cannot effectively answer this question, as pedagogy is not my expertise. I would defer and make decisions based on the input of the curriculum staff. It is some board members desire to "fix a wrong" they have witnessed in their child's school. My desire is understand from the experts in the field what will be the best decision in a case by case basis.



- 13. FCTA supports efforts to protect and enhance the state's collective bargaining laws and opposes "right to work" laws which restrict freedom of association and weaken organized labor in Maryland. Do you support or oppose public education employees' right to bargain collectively?***

The right to collectively bargain provides a bi-lateral relationship. Since it promotes fairness and consistency in employment policies and personnel decisions within and across FCPS, I support it. In addition, since belonging is a "choice" all members have the option to belong is open. Unions continue to modernize and adapt to the changing landscape. Providing employees these protections can assist in recruitment and retention.

- 14. The Board of Education must often act as an advocate for the needs of public education in Frederick County. How will you work with the County Executive and County Council to support the goals and mission of the school system? How will you reach out to other stakeholders in the community, such as the business community and parent groups to improve public education in Frederick County?***

This process begins now with supporting those candidates who publically back FCPS. Changes are needed at the county level. Educating the electorate now will only better serve this upcoming board. I currently volunteer and serve in many aspects in the community and plan to attend numerous FCPS events as a board member. Social media continues to be a great way to gain a better understanding of public sentiment. I am the only candidate running utilizing every social media platform available to Maryland candidates.

- 15. Please explain how, as a member of the Board of Education, you will work with FCTA, FASSE and the Frederick County Administrators and Supervisors Association (FCASA) so that the experience, knowledge and expertise of professional educators will help inform decisions by the Board.***

As stated previously, informed decisions based on information from FCTA, FASSE and FCASA is a must. I would recommend open lines of communications between myself and representatives from each of the groups to discuss all pertinent issues prior to major discussions.