

Mark J. Nuzzaco

Candidate for Loudoun County School Board – Leesburg District

806 Balls Bluff Road · Leesburg, Virginia 20176 · mark@nuzzacolcps.org

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Ms. Claire Scholz
LEA-PAC Chair
Loudoun Education Association
19465 Deerfield Ave., Suite 206
Lansdowne, VA 20176

Dear Ms. Scholz:

Thank you for the opportunity to present my qualifications for election to the Loudoun County School Board once again, this time to represent the Leesburg Election District, and to once again discuss my views on various education issues with the Loudoun Education Association.

As in the past, I stand confidently on my record of four years of service (2004-2007) as the Catoctin District member of the School Board. During that time I believe that I demonstrated my deep personal commitment to honor and faithfully fulfill the important public stewardship placed in me by the citizens of the Catoctin District to advance excellent public education in Loudoun County. I look forward to continuing this public service if elected this year to the Leesburg seat on the School Board, and hope that I have earned and will continue to merit the LEA's endorsement of my candidacy as I did in 2007.

My responses to the LEA questionnaire follow. They express my philosophy and views; I am of course open to and welcome a continuing dialogue with LEA and any interested parties on these and other important education issues.

1. As a school board member, you will likely face cuts to the school budget due to underfunding by the board of supervisors. What is your opinion of the least harmful areas for the school budget to be reduced?

Answer: As I replied four years ago, I continue to believe that the greatest challenge facing Loudoun County Public Schools is to continue improving educational opportunities for Loudoun's student, while avoiding overwhelming its taxpayers. This is an even more critical challenge in the current difficult economy.

During my term of office I worked to meet the increased demands of growth in student population, provide appropriate and competitive salaries and benefits, and make measured incremental improvements to the school system in the areas of curriculum, services and facilities in developing the initial School Board school budget.

Clearly, developing the school budget is a public negotiation process between the School Board and the Board of Supervisors. When faced with the inevitable budget cuts year after year, during what was really an annual negotiation/reconciliation process with the Board of Supervisors, I tried to at least maintain the status quo, and looked to areas like new

programs, delays in acquiring materials and/or implementing programs for needed reductions.

One of my biggest regrets in not being re-elected was losing the opportunity to make changes to the budget process, and this is one of the reasons that I decided to run for the School Board again. Specifically, there are two principal changes that I will pursue if elected. I have spoken about each of them at School Board meetings during my term and since, and in summary they are the following.

First, there needs to be a zero-based budget process and a formalized structure of soliciting more public input in the school budget **before** the Superintendent presents his/her budget, and **before** the School Board finalizes its proposed budget. I continue to be dismayed by the lack of citizen input in the budget process before the annual reconciliation with the Board of Supervisors. There is no excuse for this and it needs to be fixed. To address this, I propose the creation of a Citizens Budget Advisory Committee that would serve as a sounding board for the community at large, and be a resource for School Board members (who have no personal staff - nor should they) to draw upon for ideas and suggestions.

Second, there needs to be what I will call a “second look” step by the School Board that would take place after it adopts its budget, but before the Board of Supervisors sets the tax rate and requires the School Board to reconcile its budget. It always troubled me that things like state funding and insurance cost variations, etc. would occur during this time period, which didn’t seem to get factored in until the School Board had to reconcile its budget. This leads to skepticism by the public, which I believe could be mitigated by this approach.

2. LCPS has become less competitive in the Northern Virginia region in the areas of employee salaries and benefits. What priority do you give salaries and benefits in the budgeting process?

Answer: I give excellent teachers, administrators and staff, appropriately compensated, the highest priority in the budget process. I have spoken about this a number of times at School Board meetings during and since my term on the Board.

I believe that students’ positive attitudes, combined with highly qualified and motivated faculties, are the foundation of educational excellence. Therefore, Loudoun must continue to be competitive in attracting and retaining the highest quality teachers and administrators. In this regard, during my previous term of office I consistently supported appropriate and competitive salaries and benefits for teachers, administrators, and other LCPS personnel as the top priority in the school budget.

Specifically, I supported Step and COLA increases commensurate with the need to remain competitive in recruiting and retaining the highest quality educators and support staff, and which also recognize the need for education professionals to keep pace with the increasing costs of working and hopefully living in Loudoun County.

In addition, I supported increases to the stipends received by National Board Certified teachers, longevity steps for teachers and administrators, and the incremental addition of paid holidays for staff. And, I tried to the extent possible to avoid salary and benefit

reductions during what became an annual budget reconciliation process with the Board of Supervisors.

Loudoun County has great public schools that need to be maintained and further improved, but the current economy demands changes that will reduce costs while still meeting the needs and aspirations of one of the fastest growing counties and school systems in the country. If elected I will work to establish a new reality-based LCPS pay scale that -

- ❖ ***Is the cornerstone of every year's operating budget*** and recognizes that highly qualified teachers are the most important factor in educating our children, after nurturing homes that prepare students to learn when they come to school
- ❖ ***Is economically realistic, sustainable and has a more gradual rate of increase***; I see no virtue in a pay scale that has become meaningless and unsustainable in the current economy and is disregarded year after year
- ❖ ***Raises starting teacher pay*** to be competitive in the Northern Virginia market once again in order to attract the best teachers
- ❖ ***Implements a merit-based pay system*** appropriate to educating students in the classroom, not manufacturing widgets in a factory

3. Do you favor school voucher programs? Tuition tax credits?

Answer: I strongly believe that high quality public education is critical to our society. At the same time I also support a family's right to select different options for educating its children, including a means of helping a family offset some portion of the extra cost of financing an alternate education program. While I think vouchers are problematic, tuition tax credits can be useful if structured properly.

4. What is your position on charter schools?

Answer: I support charter schools as an educational alternative for some students. Because the constitution of the Commonwealth of Virginia places the responsibility for public education in Loudoun County in the School Board, charter schools should meet the same standards as Loudoun County Public Schools. Additionally, while I support appropriately qualified charter schools, realistically they should not be thought to be a panacea for the need to continue to meet the rapidly expanding school-aged population of Loudoun County through public education.

5. Do you believe if the school year or school day is lengthened that school employees' salaries should be increased proportionally?

Answer: As with other professionals, teachers and administrator's work often extends beyond the "8-to-5" workday. "Extra" hours should be compensated by salaries that are commensurate with the important responsibilities of educating our children, and competitive with surrounding similarly situated school systems. Salaries should also cover additional duties that are expected as part of the educational team at a school and shared

by teachers and administrators. Compensation would have to be considered in an evaluation of alternative school calendars. Additionally, the next School Board should inquire into what seems to be the commonly felt need by many teachers to provide supplemental classroom materials purchased with their own funds. If these materials are truly needed they should be part of the school budget. If they are actually enhancements beyond the program requirements then they remain optional.

6. Do you believe that LEA should be an active voice in school board committee meetings?

Answer: Yes. As Chairman of the School Board Legislative/Policy Committee for three years I always welcomed input to the committee from LEA or any other teachers, administrators or other interested parties. However, I do not believe that any group beyond school board members should be standing members of school board committees.

7. What is your opinion of the Virginia Standards of Learning? Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), aka No Child Left Behind? Are you aware of the funding sources for these programs?

Answer: I fully support uniform, rigorous and well-defined standards of learning, thus helping to insure that all Virginia students receive competent instruction in the basic core curriculum. I also support the goal of *No Child Left Behind*, which is to insure that every child receives competent basic educational instruction, and to hold those responsible for that instruction accountable for the proficiency of their students. However I believe that NCLB needs to be revised to address some of the unrealistic standards of measuring compliance, especially in the area of students with limited English proficiency. I would also be cautious to avoid the possibility that SOL preparation might detract from other less quantifiable educational experiences and opportunities. Although required by state and federal laws, implementation of the SOLs and NCLB mandates has been underfunded.

8. What role do you believe the LEA should have in the LCPS budget process?

Answer: I support LEA participation in all stages of the LCPS budget process I have suggested in my answers to questions one and two above.

9. Do you believe that support personnel with LCPS should be given contracts?

Answer: Absent further study, I do not favor contracts for LCPS support personnel.

10. The relationship between the school board and the board of supervisors has been strained in recent years. How would you develop a positive working relationship with your supervisor counterpart?

Answer: The governance and management of the Loudoun County Public Schools is a complex and vital inter-governmental process, with the School Board and the Board of Supervisors having different and distinct responsibilities that must be correlated to achieve the goal of excellent public education in Loudoun County.

School boards have a broad and important charge to provide quality education for the citizens of Virginia. Article VIII, Section 7 of the Constitution of Virginia establishes

the legal basis for local school boards, and this mandate is implemented by numerous statutes and case law. The county board of supervisors on the other hand has the responsibility of overall management of the county government, a large and important component of which is the school division.

These two key governmental bodies must work together closely to achieve success for the students and residents of the county. Specifically, the members of each board should be people of good will who work hard at maintaining a personally cordial relationship, even in the face of policy disagreements. The individual members of each board should strive to attain the qualities set forth on page 14 of *Virginia School Boards*, The Virginia School Boards Association, Charlottesville, VA, 1993.

Additionally, members of both the school board and the county board of supervisors must work together in establishing a school budget that meets the educational needs of the students of the county without overwhelming its taxpayers. Each board should refrain from setting the other up for undue criticism, by understanding and respecting the duties and priorities of each other's responsibilities, and working together for mutual success.

I believe that during my term of office on the School Board I met the standards mentioned above, and that I had a very respectful, cordial and cooperative relationship with my Supervisor counterpart on the Board of Supervisors.

11. Who would you turn to for advice and counsel on issues impacting the employees in LCPS? Do you believe LEA should be a partner in program development?

Answer: My response to this question is essentially the same as that to questions six and eight above. I would seek and invite input from all sources, taking into consideration their interests and expertise relative to the matters under consideration. LEA would be one obvious and important source of input.

12. Do you believe linking teacher evaluation with test scores is appropriate?

Answer: As I noted in my response to question seven above, I believe in and support standardized tests as one important means of insuring a solid basic level of competency in core curriculum, and as a method of measuring the attainment of proficiency in these subject areas. However, I do not agree that student's success or failure on these tests should be the sole criteria by which a teacher is evaluated for the proficiency of their performance.

13. What is your position on merit pay?

Answer: As I state in my campaign platform, if elected I will work to implement a merit-based pay system appropriate to educating students in the classroom, not manufacturing widgets in a factory. While I favor something more than tenure as the measure of a teacher's value in the education of students, measuring that value is a complex process involving many factors that need to be carefully thought through in developing and implementing merit pay.

14. Describe any involvement you have had with Loudoun County Public Schools.

Answer: For four years (2004-2007) I had the honor and responsibility of serving as the Catoctin District member of the Loudoun County School Board. During that time I served at one time or another on all of the School Board standing committees. In addition, I served as the Chairman of the School Board Legislative/Policy Committee for three years, as the School Board liaisons to the Loudoun County Technical Education Foundation Board of Directors, and as a member of the Discipline Committee for four years.

Since leaving the School Board I have remained concerned and actively involved with LCPS policy matters and have spoken at numerous School Board meetings and Board of Supervisor public input sessions on a wide range of topics.

My history prior to my School Board service includes the following. My wife Diane and I have been residents of Loudoun County since 1980. We have six children and over twenty-eight years of experience in the Loudoun County Public Schools. Our daughter and three oldest sons are graduates of Loudoun County High School. Our fourth son is a graduate of Stone Bridge High School and our youngest son is a graduate of Heritage High School. Loudoun County has been a wonderful place to raise and educate our family.

15. Have you ever attended school board, school board committee, or board of supervisors' meetings?

Answer: See answer to question 14 above.

My top three priorities for Loudoun County Public Schools and school employees are:

If elected I will work to:

- **Lessen taxes on households** by involving the School Board directly in seeking greater economic development in Loudoun County, with the goal of expanding the commercial tax base and obtaining new sources of revenue for needed county services - like schools
- **Implement a new zero-based LCPS budget process to reduce costs**, which includes more community input by creating a **Citizens Budget Advisory Committee**
- **Establish a new reality-based LCPS Pay Scale that -**
 - ❖ *Is the cornerstone of every year's operating budget* and recognizes that highly qualified teachers are the most important factor in educating our children, after nurturing homes that prepare students to learn when they come to school

- ❖ ***Is economically realistic, sustainable and has a more gradual rate of increase***; I see no virtue in a pay scale that has become meaningless and unsustainable in the current economy and is disregarded year after year
- ❖ ***Raises starting teacher pay*** to be competitive in the Northern Virginia market once again in order to attract the best teachers
- ❖ ***Implements a merit-based pay system*** appropriate to educating students in the classroom, not manufacturing widgets in a factory
- **Foster** a classroom environment that is conducive to learning for all students
- **Implement** an educational technology program that is effective, cost efficient and better utilized in the classroom; technology should be a tool for excellent teachers, not a substitute for them
- **Seek** alternatives to the traditional school calendar to better utilize LCPS assets
- **Seek** creative ways to offer Monroe Technology Academy courses to more students
- **Re-evaluate** LCPS building platforms and standards
- **Improve** discipline and safety in Loudoun County Public Schools
- **Foster** character development, civility and modesty in Loudoun County Public Schools

The Loudoun County Public School division has many strengths that commend it as an outstanding public education system. These include:

- Highly qualified faculties and employees who are a combination of natives of the area, along with others who bring diversity from other areas of the country and the world
- A very supportive and appreciative community that has repeatedly demonstrated its commitment to high quality public education.
- A very highly educated community
- A diverse student population that brings cultural richness to the educational experiences of Loudoun's students.
- A tradition and heritage of neighborhood schools amidst a large cosmopolitan greater Washington, DC metropolitan area

The Loudoun County Public School division's greatest "weakness" is

Loudoun County has great public schools that need to be maintained and further improved, but the current economy demands changes that will reduce costs while still meeting the needs and aspirations of one of the fastest growing counties and school systems in the country. Additionally, much more effort needs to be made to bring more public involvement to the budget and policy-making process.

As a school board member, what impact do you want to make in Loudoun County Public School?

I have had an impact on maintaining continuity for Loudoun students amidst very great growth and change. Specifically, I have succeeded in implementing policies that provide to the greatest degree possible that every Loudoun County high school student has the opportunity to complete at least their last three years of high school in one high school if they so choose. If elected again my goals as a School Board member would also include the items set forth above as priorities for LCPS.

Finally, I believe that my best attributes are the ability to be open-minded, taking into account all sides of an issue, and my desire and ability to work to achieve a consensus among people who hold differing points of view. I believe that these skills are the most important things I can bring to the next term of the Loudoun County School Board, and are the primary reason I am running for office once again.

If recommended by LEA, what assistance could we provide your campaign?

If you once again choose to recommend me for election to the School Board, I will be honored and pleased to have you notify the LEA membership of your selection, and urge them to vote for me on Election Day. I would also greatly appreciate a public announcement in the local media of LEA's support for my candidacy, along with any other logistical support for my campaign. I will not accept financial support from organizations, but would consider accepting campaign contributions from individuals.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this survey. I look forward to meeting with you at 9:30 am, Saturday, September 17, 2011.

Best Regards,

Mark J. Nuzzaco