



2017 Albemarle County School Board Candidate Interview

Candidate: Graham Paige (I)

On November 7, 2017, voters in the Samuel Miller Magisterial District go to the polls to elect their representative to the Albemarle County School Board. This recording is Brian Wheeler's September 25, 2017 interview with Graham Paige. Paige, the incumbent, is being challenged by Julian Waters (I).

The audio of this interview and complete election coverage is available on the Charlottesville Tomorrow website:

http://www.cvilletomorrow.org/topics/county_elections/

INTERVIEW

Mr. Paige, thank you for participating in this interview with Charlottesville Tomorrow. The complete audio recording and written transcript for this interview will be available online.

Information from this interview will be used in the compilation of the non-partisan voter guide being produced by Charlottesville Tomorrow. Charlottesville Tomorrow does not endorse any candidates and our goal is to provide information to the public so they can make an informed vote on issues primarily related to land use, transportation, public education and community design.

As you are aware, the first two questions you will be asked have been provided in advance, for the others you have been provided only the topic in advance. All school board candidates will be asked the same questions. We ask that you keep these questions confidential until all candidates have been interviewed.

Each candidate will be provided an opportunity to review the excerpts selected for the voter guide before its publication. Are you ready to start?

1. QUALIFICATIONS: Please describe your past experience that qualifies you to be on the Albemarle County School Board?

The top qualification would be that I have 30 years experience teaching in the public schools in Virginia. Twenty-five of those years were in here in Albemarle County, twenty-three I think out at Western [Albemarle High School] and the two at Jack Jowett [Middle School]. And after I retired from teaching, I spent some time on the long range planning committee, which helps to give the school board input on finances, redistricting, and other problems. So the 30 years of teaching experience plus the three years on long range planning would probably be my main qualifications for being on the School Board, plus being a lifelong resident here in the County.

2. PRIORITIES: What is your top priority for action by the School Board during the next 4 years?

It's pretty hard to narrow it down to one. I probably could have two top priorities that would be sort of almost tied. The first one would be the SEED program, which is included in the County budget and the Superintendent's budget for this year. And that program is trying to close the achievement gap in right now in just our urban ring elementary schools, but anything that we discover that would work in those schools will be applied to other schools outside of the urban ring. So closing the achievement gap would probably be my top priority, and then really close behind that would be High School 2022, which is designed to help us plan the curriculum for what our students will have to face after graduation around 2022 and after. Some of the things that they might face, some of the job opportunities that they might have may not be things that we know about right now, so to plan that curriculum, to make sure that our students are prepared would be my second, very closely behind the SEED program in priority.

3. CATEC: What are your priorities for the Charlottesville-Albemarle Technical Education Center and should CATEC build a new facility at Piedmont Virginia Community College?

My main priority with CATEC would be to try to make sure that we can increase enrolment there. I think in our community, a lot of people have the perception that if you don't go to college, you may not be able to succeed very well. And CATEC offers a whole lot of programs. For instance the dental technician program, the HVAC program, the automotive programs that would really help students to be well prepared to have a career outside of going into college. All of those things would be things that are really high paying, so pay couldn't be a factor when we think about going to college compared to not going to college. So the main thing is that we need to increase enrollment at CATEC and make sure that the perception of what's going on there would be sort of uplifted or enlightened within the community making sure that we just don't think that people have to go to college to be successful. And then the second main thing would be to make sure that, well with the CATEC part maybe moving to Piedmont- that could offer a whole lot of advances because Piedmont also

has some really great programs. And so if we could have them combined, maybe even on the same campus, if CATEC could move out to the Piedmont campus, that could probably really enhance some of the programs and make sure the even new programs could be developed at CATEC. So that would be a great thing.

4. ACHIEVEMENT: Why do we have persistent achievement or opportunity gaps? How do we ensure student success is no longer predictable by student race or any other cultural, economic or social factor?

Why we have that persistent gap is sort of hard to sometimes maybe explain or to talk about. One thing would be the students' background, where they are coming from. If they live in a community or if within their home, if they don't have certain advantages, like maybe access to the computer or access to good reading materials or maybe even certain types of programs that a person in a more affluent home would have access to, then those things could all lead to that achievement gap. That would probably be the main thing that causes it. And in order to sort of ensure that we can sort of overcome some of those problems, one thing [to support] would be the SEED program that I mentioned earlier. In that program we are going to try to talk or address social problems, economic problems, and academic problems that students might face. All three of those things would be factors that lead to the achievement gap. So it's really hard to identify all of the factors and to maybe address all of the factors, but they are all related to those three things: the socio problems, economic problems, or academic problems within the community and/or the home.

5. STUDENT SUCCESS: How should the school division ensure student success in the world of work and college beyond academics?

We have to make sure that all of our students are able to appreciate other cultures and accept other cultures, not maybe just their own culture, but other cultures too. And if we are able to sort of successfully teach that other cultures are important, that they all contribute to our overall community success, I think that would help to really ensure student success outside of academics.

6. BUDGET (BOTH REVENUES & EXPENSES): Name both a revenue item and an expense item in the school budget that you are concerned about and tell us why.

Alright first with the revenue one, right after we had the recession, probably around 2000-2008, the amount of money we had been getting from the state, when you adjust for inflation, is really low. It's never really come up quite to that point where it was in 2000-2009, right around in that time frame. So that would be one main thing that we have to work on with revenue with the state, to try to make sure that our state legislators can see the problem and that they'll be able to come up with some way of having funds to give to the public schools that would be bringing us back up.

Here in Albemarle County it is a huge amount of money and right off my head, I have forgotten the exact amount, but when we think about inflation, the amount of money that we are receiving from the state is really quite a bit below what it would be if what happened in 2008-2009 didn't happen and if we could sort of adjust for that. So that would be the main thing for revenue.

With expenses, the main thing would be teacher compensation and other employees within our system. We had a recent survey for teachers anyway that compared our system to other systems that would have a similar type of ranking, not just our neighboring counties, but other counties that would have similar rankings within the NISH system survey, where we were ranked, I think this year, maybe number three. So when we look at other systems like Fairfax, Alexandria, Arlington that would have a similar NISH ranking, we do pretty well in the beginning salary with those places, but then as time begins to increase, it becomes a greater and greater difference. And also with Master's degrees or advanced degrees, we begin to fall down compared to those systems. So my main thing would be to try to see if we could come up with other funds to make sure that we can adequately compensate our teachers. Even though we appear to be doing pretty well, we can still do better I think. And in order to keep the best teachers here in the County, we have to make sure that we are doing something to make their salary comparable to other areas.

7. TEACHER COMPENSATION: What would you change about teacher compensation and performance measurements if elected?

As I said just with the last question, the main thing would be to make sure that we...give better compensation for extra activities. Like if the teacher is sponsoring a club or doing some other activity outside of normal classroom activities, or if they are like a department head in high school departments, or doing something outside of their normal duties, we could give them probably bigger compensation for that. Sort of a salary increase. So that would help to close that gap some between us and some of the surrounding areas within that Niche survey.

8. OPERATIONS OF THE SCHOOL BOARD & SUPERINTENDENT: What would you like to see changed about the way the School Board and the Superintendent do business both at its meetings and outside the public eye?

During the School Board meetings, one main change probably would be to have some interaction between the Board and the public during public input. Now at times that might be a problem, so we'd probably have to come up with some way to make adjustments, sort of make sure things don't get out of hand with that. But that would be one thing that I would like to see change some because sometimes a person might come in with a question or something that we can tell from their comments that they would really like an answer to right on the spot, and so if could be able to have some kind of action under those circumstances, it would be good. Now outside the public eye, I can't think of anything that would really have to be changed because if we do have a closed meeting outside of the public eye, when we do come back into public session, what happened at that meeting would be talked

about, would be put onto the minutes. So I don't think we could do anything different outside of the public eye

9. RACE RELATIONS: If elected, what will you do to help our community move forward in the aftermath of this past summer's violent demonstrations and how will you seek to best represent and effectively serve our economically and racially diverse communities?

Seeing what happened in our community this summer was really disheartening and really a terrible thing for us because it sort of put into probably the nation's perspective and even outside of our boundaries and internationally, the idea that Charlottesville and Albemarle County was full of prejudiced people or that a lot of problems existed here that don't necessarily exist. This is not an ideal area, we do have problems, but it's not the problems that I think would be coming forward with what happened this summer.

So probably the main thing that I think our school system would have to do would be to make sure that we teach our students how to accept other cultures, how to accept other people to realize that everybody had some type of worth that would be something that would contribute to the betterment of our society. And also, to make sure that we are teaching adequate and correct history, to make sure that some perceptions that people might have of certain things really wouldn't be correct, and that those ideas would have to be corrected by education. Those would be the main things... [it] would be a really hard problem in some cases because some people would be so entrenched in their ideas until they wouldn't be able to accept new ideas, but education, trying to make sure that they realize that others have values and that some parts of our history may not necessarily be correct would be the two main things that I would work on.

10. FUTURE SCHOOL FACILITIES: What are your priorities for the school division's future facility needs?

When we think about High School 2022, some of the things that we might have to do in high schools may not even be in the building. We might have to come up with some type of way to think outside of the box, realizing that students may not necessarily have to really be in the classroom, they may not have to be in the actual school building. If they have internships in different places, that would be something that would be a part of our curriculum, it would be outside of where they would actually be going to school. So it may not have to be that we have to always expand our facilities, but we might have to try to develop better partnerships with different companies or things within our community so that we could have more internships. The school facilities in some cases might have to be updated too, they would have to be updated in a lot of cases, but the main thing is that we might not necessarily have to, again, stay within the building.

11. TECHNOLOGY: What are your views on the role of technology in education and what issues related to technology should the Board be responsible for addressing?

I think that technology would be very important within our educational system. The main thing here in Albemarle County that we would have to do is to make sure that all of our students have Internet access at home. Some parts of the county, especially some of the southern and western parts are more mountainous or hilly, in those areas having Internet access would be really difficult. And so we'd have to make sure that there is some way that we are doing within the County to make sure that all of those kids have internet access right at home, and that they wouldn't have to go somewhere else to be connected to the internet. More and more we have programs, like [accessing] part of their homework, which might be something that they get from the Internet. So there would be have be some way to make sure that everybody has Internet access. We are working on that now, but right now we don't have access to some parts of the County. So that's something that we have to really make sure that we are working on.

CLOSING: Graham Paige, thank you for participating in this interview with Charlottesville Tomorrow.