



2015 Albemarle County School Board Candidate Interview

Candidate: Dolly Joseph (I)

On November 3, 2015, voters in Albemarle County go to the polls to elect the At-Large representative on the Albemarle County School Board. This recording is Brian Wheeler's August 25, 2015 interview with Dolly Joseph (I). Other candidates in this open seat race include: Jonno Alcaro (I); and Catherine Lochner (I).

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

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

INTERVIEW

Dr. Joseph, 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 co-produced by Charlottesville Tomorrow, The Daily Progress, and the League of Women Voters. 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 Albemarle 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.

I grew up here in Albemarle County and I attended public schools, and then I went to Piedmont [Virginia Community College], and then I attended UVa for three degrees, including a doctorate in education. In my professional life I've taught at both the public and private schools here in the area, and I've worked at a non-profit here in the area serving low-income youth for six years. I've now started my own nonprofit that serve youth as they transition out of high school and into college, so I consider myself a lifelong educator who has a lot of ties to a lot of the schools and educational opportunities throughout the entire educational community.

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

My top priority is to ensure that all of our students receive the best educational opportunities that are relevant for them. That is going to require a creative use of our resources, it's going to require looking at businesses or non-profits to partner with them, because there are some budget constraints and we need to make sure that we're not solving old problems with the same old solutions that are not completely working. I'm also really passionate about making sure that people have multiple pathways through the educational system, and that we're not falling into "one size fits all," which the county seems to be doing a really good job for providing those kinds of opportunities.

3. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: Business leaders and social service agencies have told local government that new investments are sorely needed in the area of early childhood education. Will you make pre-K education and quality childcare a priority and if so how?

I think it's very important, and I think it's particularly important for underserved populations, those populations are the ones in most need for additional public funds in one form or another for their children for preschool. Our more affluent families are already providing those opportunities in various ways. Some of our schools already have pre-K in place, but it's not serving all of the students who would benefit from it. I think ways in which we make it a priority, in other words how do we fund it, we need to be looking at grant funding, we need to make it a line item in the budget if that's going to be something that we're committed to making happen.

4. ONLINE LEARNING: Schools officials have said that graduating students who are literate with technology will benefit the entire community, but many students have said that their teachers often lack the expertise/training to use the technology, and that they don't want their teachers replaced by computers. Please describe the role you think technology should play in the classroom.

As an instructional technologist, this is my area. I've taught online, I've used computers in many ways, and you cannot replace human-to-human interaction,

face-to-face interaction. You can use online learning, you can use computer-assisted learning to bring more into the classroom, you can break down boundaries.

Virginia has a great program down in Southwest Virginia where you can have access to the Governor's School and have access to experiences that they wouldn't have otherwise. What I've seen over the years is that you absolutely have to have a skilled facilitator for that. You can't just set an eight-year-old or an 18-year-old in front of a computer and expect them to suddenly just have the skills to be completely self-directed.

So I think that technology is amazing, but I also know that that doesn't replace the teacher in the classroom. I'm pleased to see, as I've been visiting the schools, that Albemarle County seems to get that. They have a lot of technology, but it's not like 'Oh, we have this nice computer screen over here so we don't need to have a teacher there anymore.'

The part that is critical is that you can have all of the nice equipment that you want, but if it's not working, or if it's not kept up, you know, children are hard on equipment, so you need to be mindful of what equipment you buy, how difficult or easy it is for students and teachers to add things on, both positively and negatively, and you need to keep it up-to-date. We all have computers in our home that were working fine five years ago. You don't have to install software that will make your computer run slow, the Internet will do that for you, and it's not even a virus, its added-on features.

Technology is another tool that you really have to have people on board with using correctly. The other thing is that I think sometimes teachers can be, like the general population, conservative about bringing in an unknown factor. I've gone in, I've found myself to be very fluid in using technology to teach with, and I've gone into situations where I have an hour to do something with a kid, and then I spend 30 minutes of it troubleshooting, and that's not a very good use of anyone's time. So it's not just on the teachers, it's also about the infrastructure that any system uses. To make sure that the teacher has training and the equipment works.

5. TEACHERS: Are we recruiting the best teachers, measuring their performance effectively and paying competitive salaries? How do we know?

I think that Albemarle County has an excellent reputation in that people want to come here and they want to live here. The challenge is that it continues to be hard to get people to actually live in the county or city because it continues to be super-duper expensive. So I think, from what I'm hearing as I go to school board meetings and I hear the people who know more than I do about it that we are still recruiting, and that there are measures in place to see if we have competitive salaries. Somebody was explaining to me about, and the budget actually says, that we are within one percentage point of competitive markets, that we pay our teachers the same amount. So it's a complicated thing to determine whether or not we're competitive. The bottom line is do you have students coming out of your classrooms who know how to do things? That's how I measure things. I'm not too invested in teaching to the SOLs, but that's a measure that's pretty important right now.

I think one thing we also need to think about as we think about personnel and teachers is that half of the people in our schools are not actually teachers, they are support staff. So the question is are we paying our support staff enough as well. I think we can get very myopic and just look at the people who, you know, 'Oh, my student is in fourth grade with Mrs. Baylor,' but you know that there are actually several people who are supporting that position as well. So we need to make sure that we don't focus only on the teachers, who, you know, if I went back to teaching right this moment and got a first-year teaching salary, I'd be doing okay, compared to what you make in a nonprofit in the Charlottesville area.

6. ACHIEVEMENT: Why do we have persistent achievement gaps? What's the single most important thing you will do to close the gap?

If I could answer why we have achievement gaps, we would have already solved the problem. There are many factors that contribute to that. We have exposure to opportunities, economic reasons, we have all the things that go along with economic reasons, which include how transitory people are, that they're moving in and out of districts, they don't have stable home lives. I can't not say the word racism. I think we have achievement gaps that, we have entire departments of social services, we have flanks of nonprofits and school systems trying to solve that problem. I don't know why.

What's the single most important thing I will do to close the gap? To advocate for students. I have spent the better part of a decade now working with under-privileged, under-served students, and I get that it's not a one-size-fits-all, and that even when you start talking about achievement gaps, and sometimes it's linked to poverty and sometimes it's just linked to boredom. I have worked with a lot of different students in a lot of different situations, from the kid who is on scholarship at a gifted school, to a really bright kid of color, to all of the different flavors of students, so I don't have a one-size-fits-all, but I do have a lot of insight into what the factors might be.

7. CITY-COUNTY-UVA RELATIONS: Describe a part of the school division that would benefit from increased cooperation by the city, county and / or the University of Virginia and that you would make a priority.

I'm actually going to change the question and say describe the part of our community that would benefit from increased cooperation. One thing I've seen is transportation. If you do not have a car in this community, it's incredibly difficult, and if you are someone who lives down in Esmont or Cismont and don't have a car or only have one car for your family, versus somebody who lives in the urban ring outside of Albemarle High School or you live downtown, those are three really different experiences, and I would challenge anybody who has a car to take a day and to try to get around this town without one. The free trolley is great, but it serves one corridor of our community and one of the more affluent and privileged aspects of our community. I've had students who live out by Rio Road trying to get downtown for a mentoring session, and it's taken them over an hour one-way. That's not even that far out. So there are a lot of things that I see that kids who live further out,

families who live further out, they cannot take advantage of this amazing town that we live in.

8. CATEC: Do you support the strategic plan of the Charlottesville-Albemarle Technical Education Center? Should CATEC build a new facility at Piedmont Virginia Community College?

My understanding is that there are a bunch of changes afoot at CATEC, which pleases me to no end, because one of the things that I've seen as I've gone into the schools is how construction, gardening, hands-on stuff that when I went through the schools was considered "not the cool thing" has really made a comeback in each of the individual schools. I think that's great. It seems like CATEC is trying to make sure that they are meeting the needs of now, as opposed to meeting the perceived needs of 30 years from now, and so expanding out of sort of the cosmetology and trades kind of stuff.

I've seen in this community that there is a need for all sorts of training. HVAC training, commercial driver's license type of things. So I support vocational education a great deal because I've heard a need and I see the kids that I work with who would benefit from that pathway don't have access to that. Should CATEC build a new facility at Piedmont? If we get a shower of money from on-high, yes. That's a loaded question. Of course, I think Piedmont is great, I spend every Monday up there, it fills a need. Do we have the money to do it, is that a priority? I don't know.

9. WORLD LANGUAGES: Would you support a budget initiative to expand world language instruction in the elementary schools?

I just found out about the world language instruction, and I think it's really interesting how, the two models were explained to me, about how you have sort of an immersion program and then you have sort of a push-in model. They have it at Cale [Elementary], and they're going to pilot it at Meriwether Lewis [Elementary].

One of the things as we think about world languages and we think about how we perceive ourselves, I know young people in this community who speak seven languages. They don't see that as a benefit because they only focus on the fact that they don't speak English all that well. And I think that we're kind of crazy that we don't see the process of learning a language, putting aside all the politics and all of that, the process of learning a language is huge.

The principal at Meriwether Lewis and I were talking about how when you're learning a language you're not giving up something, you're learning everything you need to know, the planning, the critical thinking through the lens of learning a language, and not learning a language, but learning in a language. So it seems to me that it's a shifting of resources rather than creating a whole new bubble of money to come up with those things. You know, we probably need a little bit more money to make it happen. Would I support a budget initiative if it were \$1 million? No. If it were \$10,000, yes. If it were somewhere in between, maybe. I'm definitely in support of

children learning world languages, but I'm not going to say yes and then get run out of town on a rail.

10. BUDGET: Name one specific area of the school budget that you are concerned about and tell us why.

I think one area that I'm super concerned about, and my sense as I go around and talk to people on the School Board is that we've been sort of coasting on our good reputation, and sort of stretching our money and being really creative with our money. I have been to 13 schools so far, two of which are not over capacity. The other 11 are either at or over capacity. So everyone is talking about needing more space, everyone has talked about having a certain amount of personnel assigned to their schools, and then how do they make that happen with class size and coverage and room for planning. So it seems that there is a need there.

I have also lived in this community my entire life, so I've seen how real estate taxes, which fund a large portion of our budget, I don't really want them to go up. I value both things. I value our county being a livable place, and I also value our schools because I get this feeling that somehow people think that that is separate from our community. The students and the school's are our community, students in the twelfth grade do not magically disappear. They graduate, then they become voting citizens, one hopes, they become employees and hopefully employers. So there's this disconnect of like somehow the schools are not my problem if I don't have kids in them. But they're your neighbors and the person who is waiting on you who you are really irritated at.

You know, the budget is very well thought out as you look through it. You see that it's very well thought out, you see that there are formulas, it's not just 'I really like this principal so let's just give her all of the resources,' it's definitely already calculated. And the state has definitely cut back on its funding, so I think we need to look to advocating for our schools when we go out and vote, when we are writing to our representatives and say 'This is something that we value.' Because what else are we going to do?