



2015 Albemarle County School Board Candidate Interview

Candidate: Graham Paige (I)

On November 3, 2015, voters in the Samuel Miller Magisterial District go to the polls to elect their representative on the Albemarle County School Board. This recording is Brian Wheeler's August 21, 2015 interview with Graham Paige (I). Other candidates in this open seat race include: Michael Basile (I) and Brian Vanyo (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

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 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.

There are probably two main qualifications that I think I have that would make me well-qualified to be on the school board. One would be my teaching experience in Virginia: 30 years in the state as a whole, and 25 years in Albemarle County—23 at Western [Albemarle High School] and two at Jack Jouett [Middle School]. During that time, especially toward the end of my tenure as a teacher, the impact of certain laws that were passed, but on the state and federal level, that impacted the classroom and impacted the curriculum. That would be one thing that would make me well-qualified.

The other would be the last three years on the Long Range Planning Advisory Committee. I had the chance to visit quite a few schools within the district and see the needs that really had to be met at each of those schools. Also, I was aware of the budgeting process, how it would go through quite a few steps from the time the School Board would pass a budget and the Supervisors would pass a budget.

So I think those two things would make me well-qualified, being able to see both the budgeting aspect, through the long range planning, and also the teaching and curriculum aspect through my teaching experience.

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

I probably have two main priorities: one to make sure that there is parity throughout the school division; that all of the schools—as much as possible—have the same facilities and the same curriculum. There are some slight differences in that now due to population of the schools, so I would try to work on parity within the system. And also pre-K needs within the county. That's a pretty important thing too, that would become more and more important as time rolls on.

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?

Yes, I really would. First, pre-K would need some spaces in schools. When we were working with long range planning, that was one thing that we discussed and looked at the needs for. And quite a few of the schools that would really need it the most would have very limited classroom space. So one main thing would be to try to provide space for the pre-K kids, and also to make sure that they are being worked with within the county. Private pre-K can be really expensive, and some of our kids within the county wouldn't be able to afford that, so having it within the schools would be something that would be really necessary for the county. I don't think that we can have the quality of life in Albemarle County that we are having currently if we don't provide for our pre-K kids.

- 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.**

I don't think it should replace the teachers, I think it should really help to assist and enhance the instruction that the teachers are providing. The main thing that I think we would have to do would be to provide more resources...I think the main benefit, rather, of that type of training we'll be able to give the students more experience in using the internet. A lot of them will really already know this, but to provide more practice in using the internet as a resource, and really just help them to just expand the curriculum. Some of the schools might not have all of the resources or all of the equipment that the internet could provide, so that would be another real benefit of using technology.

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

I really do think that we are recruiting the best teachers because when we look at the county's overall performance, we can see that our teachers are really doing an excellent job. And I think we should really be paying a more competitive salary compared to areas that would be like Albemarle County, not necessarily our surrounding counties, though we should make sure that we're competitive with them too. But also other parts of the state that would have a similar living wage compared to Charlottesville-Albemarle. I don't think that we're quite at that level yet, but that is something that we should be striving for; to make sure that our teachers are well-paid, because they are doing an excellent job in the schools.

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

I think the most important thing that would be causing that achievement gap is the socioeconomic differences between the students within the county. The main thing I would be doing, maybe the two main things, would be to try to have more extensive work at those schools, more resources that would be coming in, maybe even outside resources. And partnering with other facilities or other areas that might be able to provide some of that training that might be needed. Some of the teachers in some of the schools that have low-achieving kids might need more training in how to reach kids with lower socioeconomic status, so that would be an important thing.

Also working to make sure that the schools in that type of environment would have small classrooms, a lower number of students within the classroom, because that would help the students to have more direct contact with the teachers. So those would be the two main things that I would do, because that is a really important thing.

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.

Probably two main areas. The first would be using some of the technology that would be available at UVa. For instance, 3D printers. Some of the county schools wouldn't be able to afford that really, and the county overall really wouldn't be able to provide those types of things to all of the kids, and so if we use UVa as a resource—sometimes there have been workshops with them already—so making sure that that would be useable and available to all of the schools.

Then another thing that is not quite the same, but almost. The city schools have a really good fine arts program with their orchestras. So if we could find some type of way to make sure that the county schools and the city schools worked more in fine arts especially.

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?

I do support the strategic plan there, because the CATEC center really provides a lot of resources and a lot of training that would be needed within the community that the other conventional schools wouldn't be able to provide. And as for building a new facility, that probably would be something that would really help, but I guess I would have to have more study, or do more study, as to whether or not that would be the way to go. I recognize that CATEC is extremely important within the community though.

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

Yes. As the world sort of shrinks due to computers and a lot of other things it's really important that we realize that being able to communicate with a lot of different countries, like China, Russia, a lot of countries, Iran even, that we would really have the need to be able to communicate with those other countries, and also to be aware of their culture. And by doing that we would probably be able to have better economic ties with those countries. And so that is something that would really be necessary. That would be the main thing, the world economy and the need to identify more and find out more with their cultures.

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

The main area are the funds that would be available for modernization and renovation of some of the schools, and sometimes that has been dropped down lower on the scale because of the needs of other areas of the county, like fire services and police. So even though those two areas really provide us with some really important things we need within the county, sometimes renovation and modernization have not occurred in some of the schools that really needed it because of funds being diverted to other areas. So that would be probably the main area that would be my concern.