



2015 Albemarle County School Board Candidate Interview

Candidate: Jonno Alcaro (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 Jonno Alcaro (I). Other candidates in this open seat race include: Dolly Joseph (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

Mr. Alcaro, 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.

First I'd like to say thank you to you and Charlottesville Tomorrow for having me in here for this. I really appreciate that.

My history does not include educational experience other than being educated, so I've been going through a lot of my "education education." By going around I've visited all 26 schools, met all the principals, I've been doing a lot of door knocking, and that has helped me get prepared. In terms of my past experience, I'm a business man, and I'm coming up on 40 years in the business arena, and I've learned a few skills along the way that I think are very transferrable over to the Board, and being on a school board is something I've wanted to do for the last 30 years, but with all of my business travelling, I haven't been able to.

First of all I'm a good listener. I listen to all interested parties, I listen to the answers of the question that I ask. I'm a good decision maker, I'm a good deliberator, I'm a good budgeter, and I'm good at planning. I've got 30 plus years in all of those. Those are the primary things in terms of experience that I bring that I think qualifies me for the Board.

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

In knocking on doors, I've been hearing from parents who are affected by redistricting. Really having a lot to say about that. And at the same time I don't have an agenda that I'm going in with. I don't have any pet projects. I'm going in to work on the issues of the school board and to listen and make decision on that. But one thing that I would like to do is to determine the review process for past programs. So there are programs that we thought were a good idea at the time, that are just going on and on whether or not they are being effective. I'd like to get a regular review process put in place. In some cases it would be one year, in some cases it would take three years because things take time to develop, and in other cases five years, but I can't see that any program should go more than five years without being reviewed.

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 agree with the business leaders and the social services agencies that have said that. Whether it's so much of the child is formed by age three or age four or age six, I think it's a given that early education is important. I know there are some programs in some of the schools now, whether they are in Head Start or some of the others, but that only covers about 340 kids. In order to make room or set up programs for other kids, especially those in need, that's going to come down to funding, and right now the Board is operating under pretty concise spending limits, and so it's a matter

of taking away from Peter to feed Paul. So you have to determine where the money is going to come from. I think looking just outside our programs, things like Head Start and other federal programs; that may be the way we have to look. So I'm in favor of doing it, I'd love to see it in all of the elementary schools. Every elementary school principal who I spoke to is very much in favor of it, but it comes down to the funding.

- 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.**

Well certainly it should never replace the teachers, and there are three students, one from Western, one from Albemarle and an eighth grader from I forget which middle school who said to me that they were a little concerned about the technology that was in place because it was somewhat pulling them away from their teachers, and that some of them were having to look online at night to see the videos that their teachers had put online, and then that they did different things during the day in the classroom. I understand that's called flipped classes, and my daughter's actually had experiences with that too. As long as the content that they are watching online at night relates to the discussion in the classroom the next day, and the teachers can be as involved as they want to be with the students, I don't have a problem with that. I would say that the three retired teachers who I've talked to about this all hoped that flipped classrooms would die a quick and unpleasant death because they were hands-on teachers, and I don't think technology can ever replace a good, hands-on teacher.

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

I was knocking on doors over the weekend, and I must have been in the right school district because I had every single person I talked to who had a child in the system say that we've got the best teachers, and that we absolutely love the teachers. We live out near Crozet and my daughter goes to Western [Albemarle High School], and she's very happy with all of her teachers, and a lot of the parents are too. Are they the best? I don't have a way of measuring that, but in terms of measuring their performance, it can't just be standardized testing that goes into that. I think it has to be a myriad of things that go into determining whether or not their performance is what it needs to be.

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

I have to tell you that this is something that I'm going to need to study a little bit more. I know that there are gaps that have to do with, that are in schools that have high Title I numbers of students. I'm not enough of a pro to be able to give you an

answer yet. This hasn't been a part of my "education education" yet, but I can tell you that I would study it and I would act in what I thought was the best manner.

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 think the gifted student program has been very effective in the three high schools, and yet I would say that any additional work done with schools like UVa or [Piedmont Virginia Community College] can do nothing but help it and inspire it. I know there have been considerations to require AP classes before one graduates. I've asked what if you're a music major and that's your passion, there is no such thing as AP music. So I think that is a debate that is still open, and I'll be interested to see how that one turns out.

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 whole-heartedly support the strategic plan. CATEC was one of the 26 schools I visited and was able to see in-depth. I also understand that one or two members of a school board could serve on a joint board with the city, and I'll be raising my hand for that position when I get on the board. I've only learned in the last couple of days about the thought of building it at PVCC, so I need to look into that.

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

Absolutely. When I lived overseas in London and travelled throughout the Middle East for work, it was such an eye-opener to see how many languages the kids spoke, and as a result the adults spoke, and I think we're far behind in that. I think the program that is in place at Cale [Elementary] with full-immersion Spanish, that was an eye-opener to me, and I know there are people who have worked at Cale and who are now principals who would love to be able to put that in their schools. So I think absolutely, the more opportunity there is for world languages of all sorts, I would love to see that.

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

Actually, the easy answer to that is expenses, and that comes from 33 years of budgeting experience. But as I mentioned to you before we started to speak is that after this interview, I'm on my way over to pick up a paper copy of the budget from the Superintendent's office, and I will be much better informed of that after I've had an opportunity to go through that and really grind down. You always want to look at expenses, but the other side that is of concern to me is the revenue side, because I know that we're still operating at \$600 less per student than we were in 2008. So everyone made the cuts during the recession, but they weren't given back. I'd love to

see the state open the coffers a little bit. I'd love to see some monies coming in from companies who are moving in here, want to move in here or are already here, in order to support projects that we would want to do.