



2015 Albemarle County School Board Candidate Interview

Candidate: Caroll "CJ" Hatcher (I)

On November 3, 2015, voters in the White Hall Magisterial District go to the polls to elect their representative on the Albemarle County School Board. This recording is Brian Wheeler's September 2, 2015 interview with Caroll "CJ" Hatcher (I). Other candidates in this open seat race include: David Oberg (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

Ms. Hatcher, 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.

Well, I have a lot of past experience in education. I spent my entire career in education, as a matter of fact, but in various different areas, wearing different hats. I was a high school teacher for 10 years. I have been in the trenches and I understand the complexities of the classroom teacher's job, and it can be complex. I've measured the ability to convey critical content to students, all the while being counselor, coach, and disciplinarian, whatever. So a lot goes into being a classroom teacher, and I did that for 10 years.

Later, as director of education for a large media company, not only did I create an educational program, I was in charge of employees, actually 25 or so at different times, and a very large budget. I was able to travel around the country showing other companies, similar companies, media companies how to engage with their school districts in their own communities doing projects as we had done in the Houston, Texas area. Having gained national attention for this work, when my husband moved us back and forth across the country, moving for his various jobs, I decided that I would start my own business, and I did. It was an educational publishing company. We were successful. We marketed our product nationwide. We were a niche market, and for that niche market we became a leader for almost 25 years.

I have authored 33 books that are used in the classroom, and I have sold those books in teacher supply stores, the Smithsonian Bookstore, places like that. Teachers have bought them, and you know, just came a long way with that program, and I'm very proud of those things that we did with the company. I'm a freelance education writer, and a national columnist. I produced a 24 month series of articles on higher education for a national newspaper, and the series went on twice a month for 24 months. I've served on textbook committees, literacy boards, I've worked at the community college level.

And at the policy level, I was appointed, when I lived in the state of Nevada, I was appointed by Governor of Nevada Kenny Guinn to serve on his executive board. I was an executive education advisory to the Governor. So, with all of that, I think I'm qualified.

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

Well, in Albemarle County, one of the greatest challenges we have in this county is spending for capital projects in our older schools. A lot of the older schools are in need of modernization. Some of them are just in total disrepair. But most of them are okay and the children attend, but they are in dire need of modernization. My priority will be to study alternative methods for funding the capital projects that are most important in the district in order to make the older facilities better learning environments for the students. Sometimes I like to call this fiscal stability to support learning. In other words, find the resources, then prioritize the use of the resources in the best way possible to support capital improvements, thus supporting student

achievement. Alternatives such as bond referendums would remove the tax burden on county residents. Students would benefit of course, not only with a modern facility, but would also reduce the need for disruption through redistricting or other temporary solutions. The urban ring has grown quite large, and there's a need to do something about the schools that are in disrepair, so we can get more students into more places that are closer to home.

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?

Well I love the Bright Stars program. I think we should continue to fund the program, it's a great program. Also, we've got to look at families. Families are the first educators. Bright Stars was designed for families in need of financial aid or in need of getting the child or children ready, or those that don't have intact families or resources at home to help. But I know we've talked about universal pre-k, and that seems to be what the question is targeting, and I think for right now, Albemarle County does a great job with Bright Stars in the targeted market that we work with. And just thinking as a school board member, I would need to be a good steward of public funds, and I would say that right now, we should continue to do what we do well, and enhance the program at another time.

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.

Gosh, in the 21st century, technology really is everything, and I think we need that online learning both in the classroom and in a situation of virtual education. Those are two areas, I divide online learning or technical learning into these two areas: virtual education, which is kind of a wave of the future, where the students are off-campus, and that would relieve some of the problems of overcrowding in some of our buildings. As you know the Albemarle senior high school is busting at the seams. So that's one use. The other of course is the technology in the classroom as the question states. Should we replace teachers? No. The teacher is very necessary for the classroom, however we do need teachers who are professionally trained, so this would be, we would have to target a program for professional development to get those teachers on target. But it's just the wave of the future. We absolutely need technology in the classroom, in all classrooms, because as you pointed out, the student could be much more literate than the teacher, however there's never a situation where we should remove the teacher from the classroom. In my opinion.

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

Well, how do we know? I hope that Albemarle County is paying a competitive salary to teachers. I know there's the age-old problem of funding. How do we fund? How do we raise money for funding and such? But I understand the school district did a study, I don't know how recent it was, but I think it was pretty recent, where I think it was just a survey they sent to the teachers and the teachers were asked if the teacher would prefer an increase in salary or a lower class size, and I believe that the teachers checked an increase in salary, so there's your answer. We do, maybe, need to reevaluate the salaries that we give to our teachers, and maybe compare statewide. Of course we're close to northern Virginia, and cost of living and different things, we need to look at that. I know some teachers who work in the county, but can't afford to live in the county, so that is a problem we really need to look into.

As far as evaluating goes, I know when I was a teacher, we were evaluated, a lot of time by principal walk through. Fortunately I was in the position that when the principal walked through and visited our classroom. He did it many, many times. It was over a whole period of a year, or several months anyway. So our evaluation was not just based on one little window of what he saw that particular day, but it was based over a long period of time.

I think teachers, it's a shame that we tend to evaluate teachers on the performance of their students on the standardized test, and I think—of course that's another subject—but standardized testing, maybe we need that, but we really need to evaluate students in a different way. Maybe in hands-on, practicum ways. So, in other words, getting back to the teacher, the teacher might feel freer to encourage creativity, to create some lessons outside of the box, to create practical lessons to teach the content. When I was teaching economics I used to do a lesson where, just teaching the concept of diminishing returns, the students would always have a hard time with that. So I would bring donuts into the classroom, especially if the class was in the morning. Oh my goodness, the students would want to eat five, six, eight, 10, but after they had fifth donut, they didn't want any more donuts, so they could understand that concept. It sounds silly, I know, but sometimes it just doesn't connect unless teachers can provide these creative lessons, and I know a lot of teachers feel like they can't because they have this rigorous curriculum to get through so that the kids are on target for the standardized test, SOL or whatever.

At any rate, I think that we should just do a better job. Albemarle is an outstanding school district in that regard too. In the central Virginia area, it's the best school district in my opinion.

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

Well I think one reason for the achievement gap is that some students do not perform well on standardized tests. As I said a minute ago, I think we should test the students a little bit differently. Everything should not rely on the one test for the year,

or whatever. That brings in all sorts of things. No Child Left Behind, I think, is up for reauthorization, and I want to say how much money would that take? Is it worth it? I understand that the federal government gives the state the money, for No Child Left Behind, then the school district gives the state the data, and it does this in sections, or subgroups. So one subgroup, be it a special classroom or an ESOL classroom doesn't do well, then sometime the whole district is evaluated on that one subject, and that's not really a fair showing of the achievement for the student, for the teacher, and all involved.

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 it's really great that the city, county and University get along. I understand that there was a study done, I'm not sure when, but it was the University of Virginia and they worked with Albemarle County, I'm not sure if they worked with the city on their study, but they were studying school discipline. But the question was should students who are suspended be off-campus, or should we provide for them a place in school suspensions. It was an elaborate study, I think, I don't have the research in front of me, but it was very helpful and interesting and I understand that the Curry School [of Education] is wonderful at UVa, and they do have an opportunity to test their research on our school district, and I think that is a great way to work with them. Another way that I know we're doing well is at [the Charlottesville-Albemarle Technical Education center] and the [Piedmont Regional Education Program] program. PREP, that's been several counties working together and that's been working very well, so I think we should look into it. It's a positive win-win for everybody.

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 think CATEC is a great program. It's a wonderful place. Gosh, when I was in high school, or even when I was teaching, we had vocational classes for students within every high school in the district, and it just didn't make any sense. So the shared cost benefits everybody. I think it's between 300 and 400 students that enjoy a learning program out at CATEC. And we even have post high school classes I think, so I think it would be a mistake to change anything. But going to the next question, should they build another facility at Piedmont? Gosh, I don't know. That would probably be more money for all of us, however that's a solution when it comes to finding another building. It would alleviate some of our funding from capital improvements. We have the building already there, so maybe the building could be used for something else, and then would the city and the county cooperate on the use of that building. But we'd have to look into how much it would cost to build a new facility at CATEC, and right now we seem to struggle every year with our budget. Sharing is a great idea, but I would put that project off for a while.

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

I like the fact that world languages is discussed now. I think it's, gosh, at a younger age, children are able to master foreign languages better. In this day and age, in a global economy, we need to know, or the students need to be more prepared to communicate in other languages. I would suggest to start, if we did have an initiative to start anything, maybe to test run it at a few elementary schools. There might be one or two schools that already do this, I'm not sure, but I would test this first before I put it in to all schools. But it's a great idea and it's so valuable to have these children learn another language when they're young. By the time they're in high school, it's a little bit harder to learn. They struggle a little more.

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

Well my top priority was capital improvements, and recently I was appointed to the Long Range Planning Advisory Committee, and I haven't been on the Committee for very long, but it did open my eyes to the fact that I do think that if we do anything long-term extensive in terms of the budget, we really do need to look at our capital improvements money, and we need to look at the other problem, which is redistricting. And both of those have come up here lately. From time to time we redistrict our students. We pull them here to go there, and so on. So the urban ring of schools is overcrowded, so we need to spend some time looking at how we could improve that, and that would solve two problems. We would perhaps solve the redistricting problem, which really is short-term problem. If we could spend the money we have in the capital improvements to make the schools larger and better and modernized. Or perhaps like a school where I live, Broadus-Wood [Elementary], I don't think it's as populated anymore. And I know they're talking about busing students out there, but we really need to look at that as compared to a capital improvement at a school closer to where they're located. So capital improvements, that's my deal.