



2015 Albemarle County School Board Candidate Interview

Candidate: Michael Basile (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 September 3, 2015 interview with Michael Basile (I). Other candidates in this race include: Graham Paige (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. Basile, 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 my number one qualification is that I am great at finding solutions to problems and fixing things. For instance, in Texas I started a nonprofit that helped engage and educate community organizations and churches about the need to fight against child sexual abuse. When I first dove into this problem, I found that the churches just didn't know anything and they didn't have people that were actively working in the organizations that were protecting kids. So it was frustrating, but it forced me to continue going into different parts of the community to find out who was working on these problems and how we could best solve the problems.

With that energy, and I love to meet people, I was able to go out and find some programs that work. I was able to bring them back to the churches and I was able to help some of the churches get people to the organizations that were actually helping kids in the form of volunteers, and we really started building relationships and providing needed resources to agencies that needed them. That was just by me going out and doing things that other people weren't doing. I was able to find solutions for some of the problems that we had.

And then the same thing when I was working in the factory in factory management. It's amazing the amount of problems that creep up, whether it is maintenance, machinery, systems, personnel, logistics, supplies, etc. There's always problems that come up and over time, with creativity, you build up a lot of different methods for solving the problems and you find efficiencies, and you are able to save costs, and make things run a lot smoother which actually makes a much better product in the end and the customers are happier. So those kinds of experiences help me use that gift of fixing things and finding solutions for problems and I think we've got some [problems] in our school system that we need to address that aren't being addressed now to fix. So that's one qualification.

I have 8 years of teaching experience in the Marie Corps as a flight instructor. I was a pilot and a flight instructor so I was training students and I was making sure those students got the same training and that everything that they learned was standardized compared with everyone else. I was also responsible for any remedial training -- that those students needed, to make sure they got that, so that they were able to complete their training in the allotted time -- and also the evaluation of all the students making sure that they were able to complete the tasks or would have to sometimes find other opportunities in employment for the ones that weren't able to. But all that evaluation and training was something that was in my past as well.

I think lastly, it's because I am willing. I have a lot of energy. I love meeting people, I love helping people find solutions, and I am willing to put the time in to serve out the rest of this term for the Samuel Miller [district].

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

Ok, number one priority is teaching our students how to build wealth, how to accumulate property so that they can become financially independent and responsible for themselves, responsible for their families, capable of helping out their families who are in need, their neighbors and helping out in the community. So that's the number one priority for all of us.

There's a lot of different types of property. Our schools presently they are not teaching students about property or how to build wealth and create wealth. I asked one of the top students who graduated from Western [Albemarle High School] last year and they didn't remember any instruction on how to become wealthy or what is property, how do you use property. We've got people throughout our community who accumulate property, they take property, whether it's intellectual – songs, lyrics, software, books, people who write books and just create property out of thin air – people who develop real estate, people who buy and trade stocks or collect stocks. There are all these different forms of property and money, funds that are available, retirement assets, and all these things are things that our students need to know and be aware of. These are the things that help the 'one percent' own 35 percent of all the land and 35 percent of all the stocks and resources that provide them the wealth that they have and enjoy. We need to teach our students how to work towards those so that they can accomplish the goals that they have for themselves.

Some of the great things about that, we'll have to teach them how to budget, how to pay themselves first, how to put money aside out of their cash flow into investments, we'll have to teach them how to protect property, how to use the law so that if someone takes their property how they can use the law to get it back, what their rights are this in turn will teach them about respect for property and we should see people with more respect coming out of the schools for personal property, people's lawns etc. We also will need to talk to them about business ethics. Our kids need to know what proper business ethics are so that they can conduct themselves in appropriate lawful manners when they get out of school. And I think that is kind of what we are looking for because part of the SOLs coming down from the state is that we teach our kids to be productive members of society, although I don't think anybody's really saying [laughter] well this is a productive member and this is not.

What we do want is certainly responsible members of society. They have to know the law. They have to practice respecting the law and they have to know how to pick themselves up and accumulate property, create value in property, so they can take care of themselves. I think that's our number one priority. The results of that, what's it going to look like if 20-30-40-50 percent of our students coming out of our public schools at the end of high school, are able to start accumulating savings and wealth, I think it would be an incredible sight for our county to see a reduction in safety net use, social welfare type things, we should be able to bring those things down instead of seeing a constant increase in the need for free and reduced lunch in schools, etc. And I think it would be just amazing to actually build a community that knows how to acquire wealth so that it can do the things that it wants to do. It would be a boon for

people across the state, people across the nation. People would love to be here. It would be a happening place, even more so than we are now.

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 think so. Last year, I remember a report that came out – I have very little experience with early childhood education or Head Start, etc. – but I do remember a report that said Head Start was not providing a head start to the children that were in its programs. So I believe some of our early childhood education programs are funded by the county, funded by the schools, I believe, I am not sure, but I think the best thing for us to do is if Head Start isn't providing a head start to our students then let's open it up to some of the other organizations in town and let's find the organizations that will come in and provide the best service for the best price.

That doesn't mean the cheapest, but let's not go with systems and programs that are not working. Certainly we've got parents that need to get out and get to work and they need a place for the kids to go and the option seems to be they either do that or the parent doesn't get a chance to go to work in that field. Somehow we will have to help find employment or help create employment for some of the parents that need it that would better fit into a child's schedule, but in the meantime we need to do the best that we can and I don't think our school administration or our current efforts are the best answer. I think the best answers are going to be found in the community with the groups and organizations that are doing like services. Let's let them come to us and offer what they can.

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 like how that question is worded because I have heard several students complain about the technology that sits in the classroom that just doesn't get used because they haven't figured out how to best use it yet. I think first let's slow down on administrative purchases of high tech equipment just for the sake of getting it in the classroom. Let's take a different approach. Let's wait until we have programs that people want to implement and figure out what equipment they are going to need for those programs and then we will build a program around making that work.

As far as online learning, goodness there is so much to look forward to with that. The first thing is we need to train a lot of our teachers about wealth, building wealth and accumulating property. So online training for them is probably going to be part of that solution and I think that our teachers should be rewarded or provided bonuses for successful completion of these types of programs because they are

going to turn around and have to start providing that instruction to our kids. So that is one of the first uses for online learning.

Some of our students are ready for it, they are mature enough, they can probably stay at home and take courses online, and then perhaps just come in for testing in the classroom or at the school. That will certainly free up some space in some of our schools. We need to explore that and see how that's going to work and we need to use students that are capable of handling that type of scenario. So we have to be careful in that respect.

But other classes, of course, we have the capability of instead of bussing students all across Albemarle of having students in one school doing online learning with a class that's going on in another one of our Albemarle schools or certainly other schools across the country. That still uses the classroom time but now it cuts down on transportation problems and some of the others. There's so many different ideas and ways to do this and so many of them are going to be successful. I don't have the answers, but we've got some great educators and staff who are going to be able to figure out how they want to attempt to use these. Let them figure it out, let them take the initiative, let them figure out which ones are working the best and we will go with it.

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

Ok, who can answer the first one, the second one, the third one or the fourth one? That's a good question. Well we want to recruit the best teachers. Certainly by providing freedom and financial opportunity and reward to people who work for it and deserve it is certainly going to attract great teachers especially in our Charlottesville-Albemarle area. So let's do that. Let's promise teachers, provide teachers rewards and bonuses for successful accomplishment of the goals that the community and the school board put forth to the schools. This is what we want you to do, we want you to make sure that more students coming out of our schools know how to build wealth and become wealthy and take care of their families, for instance. So we will provide bonuses and rewards to our teachers for that.

Measuring their performance effectively and paying competitive salaries?
Competitive salaries? We just want to make sure our teachers get a fair salary and that they have an opportunity to accumulate other rewards while they are in their pursuits. So if we have a teacher or a group of teachers or educators who come up with a great way of using online learning then let's get them the help to build out a business plan. Let them use that, they can use that, that then becomes their business, their property and they get rewarded for it and we can license that out, or they can license it to our schools or other schools across the country. Let's give them those opportunities to build up their ideas and their finances as well on their own without going to the taxpayer and saying hey we need to cough up more money.

And then how do we know? Well we know by [whether] we have more or less students coming in that need free and reduced lunch, are the students coming out better capable with handling decisions about life or employment, are they better able to go to work and get jobs. Obviously we have a very high rate, and success rate of getting students to college. It's incredible what some of our students do and where they are able to go and how those educations will benefit them and their families. But still I think we really need to focus on improving [outcomes] for some of those students who don't do as well and they are not some of the highlighted achievers in our schools, those are the folks we really want to work on picking up and I think that's where we will be able to measure the most, the best teachers that can do that.

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

Again I think we have tried everything else. We have tried to put kids in classrooms and teach them how to do math over and over again, and science and English, and for a lot of students those classes just aren't very interesting. But if we bring in some of our 'one percenters' from the area or maybe some very wealthy people they know and have seen on TV or in the media, we put them in front of them and have them begin to explain how they have accomplished what they have accomplished in their life, I think that we are going to be able to inspire some students who are not really very inspired now. We may not get them very far, but we need to give them the basics and the concepts. It's not just about going out and getting a job at a fast food restaurant or wherever they may work, but budgeting to make sure that they have got a little income left over when they are done, that they pay themselves with part of that money, and that they start putting money aside for the future. Let's put some people in front of them that will inspire them.

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 come right back to business development. I heard a radio news brief a couple weeks ago about a UVA professor, I think a professor, but somebody at UVA that is helping instructors there start businesses. I am not sure how he goes about it, I have his name written down at home and I hope to contact him soon, but his idea is a lot of the professors there are in fields where they can generate income, they can create their own business – again it is a matter of building wealth and creating property, creating and accumulating property for the individuals – and we can do that with our teachers in Albemarle County, we can do that with our staff in Albemarle County. We've got business expertise not only in Charlottesville schools, and in UVA, but also at [Piedmont Virginia Community College] and all across our community. I think there may be some very fun relationships and cooperation that could develop over that especially if we really begin to help people generate income and profits from it. Business development is a big place for that relationship to grow right now.

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?

You know I don't remember hearing this much in the community, most people that I talk with aren't talking about moving CATEC to PVCC. But there are some that are - I remember Supervisor Diantha McKeel spoke with me about it, and there may not be many other people that have talked to me about it – so there are some people very excited about this move, but I don't think that it is coming from the community. I don't believe it is coming from the community, so I don't support moving CATEC at this time.

I do support CATEC and its mission and hopefully expanding its capabilities where it is at and in the future wherever its best location is determined to be. But it is an expense that we don't need to take on at the moment. The Albemarle County Schools are the county's schools, it's the citizens of the county, and the schools should be doing what the school board assigns it to do and I think we need a lot more involvement from the community. Decisions like this need to be put out in the community and the community needs to come back and wholeheartedly support it before we really start making plans to do it. So that's one of the things I really want to work on, helping directives come from the community and the school board going to the school administration rather than coming from the school administration to the school board and then having to discuss that.

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

Simply no, and here's why. What is better, speaking Spanish or building wealth and taking care of your family? I am confident that our priority is helping our community and especially those in the lower incomes, pick themselves up, it's not building comprehensive language programs. The folks that really want their kids to learn second languages have that opportunity currently in our schools and we have always got private instruction and tutoring for languages as well. But I think as a county let's help those in the lower income brackets how to pick themselves up and build wealth and really start putting themselves in a position where they can take care of themselves before we pick up other responsibilities.

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

This is interesting, let me name two. Building maintenance because I spoke with a gentleman who works in building maintenance and he told me there is a lot of waste and abuse of taxpayer money in that department. Good management means that they are going to be on top of waste and abuse and have it stopped. Another part of good management is finding cost savings. One of the first things that we want to do in the budget is find the cost savings that are available to us all across the board in our administration. I know one place that we really can't cut and that is teacher time with the students, and the amount of time that it takes to teach students and give

them the opportunity to practice the skills that we want them to learn. Now I knew that as a flight instructor, it takes a certain amount of time to teach certain aspects. But when it comes to building maintenance, administrative tasks, and so many other parts of an organization there's places we can find lots of savings, so let's find them. That's job number one with our budget and we can look at building maintenance.

Another thing that I want to look at is all expense accounts. When folks are out spending taxpayer money, taxpayers should be able to see what is being purchased. As a part of transparency let's put those budgets online where our citizens can view the expenses, what's being bought and paid for, and that way not only will it provide transparency and accountability it will also give people in the community opportunities to see a place that we could save more. Maybe they have a better way of purchasing something, a cheaper means of acquiring a service or equipment, and then the community can actually bring that forward and further save money for the county.