



## **2013 Charlottesville School Board Candidate Interview**

*Candidate: Juandiego Wade*

On November 5, 2013, voters in the City of Charlottesville go to the polls to elect their representatives to three seats on the Charlottesville School Board. This recording is Tim Shea's September 17, 2013 interview with Juandiego Wade. The other candidates in this race include: Ned Michie; and Leah Puryear.

*The audio of this interview and complete election coverage is available on the Charlottesville Tomorrow website:*

[http://www.cvilletomorrow.org/topics/city\\_elections/](http://www.cvilletomorrow.org/topics/city_elections/)

### **INTERVIEW**

**Mr. Wade, thank you for participating in this interview with Charlottesville Tomorrow. The complete audio 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, C-VILLE Weekly, 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, some of the questions you will be asked have been provided in advance, others have not. All City 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. Please describe your past experience that qualifies you to be on the Charlottesville School Board.**

I am qualified because I care. I care about children and education from a deeper background. My father was a public education teacher in Richmond Public Schools for nearly forty years. I was raised with five brothers and sisters and education was part of my life.

I didn't know that I wanted to get into this aspect of education. When I decided to make Charlottesville my home, through my fraternity we were involved with a mentoring program where we took a group of young boys from Walker Upper Elementary School starting in the fifth grade, and we followed this group of young men all the way through their graduation. Through that process, working with these same young boys I saw a lot of things that I felt could be changed in the education process. In 2006 when they graduated the election of school board started. I thought that was an opportunity for me to have a different or deeper impact on the education process.

What qualifies me is mainly I care. I have a deep passion for education and children.

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

I think that the top priority for Juandiego Ricardo Wade, and probably for other School Board members is to secure funding. That is primarily from the State and Federal Government. We have been blessed by the City Council who has helped us out for the last few years. But for the last 5 or 6 years we have seen a decrease in the funding we have received. Even though we have received more funding from the city; that did not compensate for all the money we did not get from State and Federal government, so we have had to cut. That has had an impact on some of the services we have to provide. What has happened is funding has decreased but mandates have increased, and that is not a good mixture. Despite all of that we are still progressing, we are still doing well in the system. If the funding could keep up with the mandates and things we really would be doing a lot better, so my top priority is to secure funding.

**3. Is your school division recruiting the best teachers and measuring their performance effectively? How do you know?**

Yes, we are recruiting the best teachers. We are fortunate here in Charlottesville to have the University of Virginia which recruits spouses many of whom are teachers in the school system for anywhere from two to ten years. We are recruiting with the African American Teacher Fellows; we recruited historically Black Colleges and Universities, at major teaching

recruiting fairs. I believe we are recruiting and attracting the best teachers to the Charlottesville School District. I think that both Charlottesville and Albemarle are benefiting from some of the uncertainty in the surrounding localities with pay and teacher moral. I was recently told that several years ago teachers that came to the system, it would take a few years for them to get their credentials straight because they would have to get their teacher's license. And now, well over 90% of the teachers that come to the system have all of their credentials in place and have many years of experience. That's what has happened in the education field and we are benefitting from that. We know that at some point, because of the economic downturn 4 or 5 years ago, that not only Charlottesville but a lot of school districts will see a big turnover of teachers who have just been holding on and waiting for their finances to get back in place. At some point I believe there will be a big need for teachers because of retirement.

As far as how we know we are getting those best teachers we can see it in the classrooms, we have teacher's evaluation, and the unofficial is that we hear from parents. Yesterday morning I had coffee with a parent, she is president of one of the PTOs, and she was lauding the teachers and the principals of a particular school. I believe we are doing a good job of it, there's always room for improvement but I'm happy with the direction and the path that we are in.

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

I've been hearing about this achievement gap since before I got on the board, and I'm not sure if I am smart enough to answer that question. There is not one particular answer. I know that for some families in our community, white of black, that education is a priority but when you get home and you don't have that support to help you with your homework because your parents are working a second or third job. My daughter when she gets home she has a desk and a room to do it. In a situation with two or three families living there, you don't have that same sanctuary where you can go and do your work it is more difficult to achieve that. We have many families in this community that are like that. I'm never going to be the one to say that poverty is less, that you can't get that education; but that is something we have to acknowledge in our system. We have almost 60% of our students are qualified for free or reduced lunch.

I have a master's degree in Urban and Environmental Planning, so I've done a lot of work in looking at the numbers and socio-economic data. It makes a difference when you have to spend so much of your time and money, and resources, to pay the rent, and buy groceries, and all of that equals to you don't have as much time to spend with your son or daughter to help them with education. We have resources to help in the school, but a lot of that is best

done at home. The home can't support that and that is part of it, but for each family it is different. We are working on that, we have tons of nonprofits in the community and tons of resources in the community. We are working on it but we still have a ways to go. I want to see a situation where that achievement goes up, but a rise where all of our students are doing better. And we have, I've talked with recruiters from UVa and top Ivy League schools, and they tell us the products they are getting from our Charlottesville, as well as Albemarle Schools are those top students. But we have to look at all 4,000 students that are in Charlottesville schools. We know our top students are going to do well. The achievement gap is something that, as an African American male, is a question that comes up all the time. Someone who currently mentors 4 or 5 young boys now, that having someone in your life that you can depend on that you can turn to and say I need this new graphing calculator that costs \$130 dollars, for some families it is easy. For some families that is two months' worth of extra money. There are certain barriers in this community that we have to acknowledge. We have myself and other school board members and others in the community that are willing to address those and ready to fight for it.

The single thing that I would do to close that gap is simple. I won't lose focus. I will keep that in the forefront. There are members in the community that won't let me do that, but I will not lose that as a focus.

**5. Describe a part of the school division that would benefit from increased city and county cooperation that you would make a priority?**

I have been an employee of the county for twenty-three years, so I know Albemarle County like the back of my hand. It provides food on my family table. I know members of the school board, the board of directors, many of the principals, I am very comfortable talking and communicating with Albemarle County. There are many things that we can do together, and we do. There has always been talk of collaboration, or combining school systems. Time to time that will come up; I personally do not think that combining school systems at this time is something that is feasible. We have different visions. Not that either one is better, it is just different for the two school districts. We do many things together, I think at this point probably one thing we can do together that is the most feasible, and get the most bang for our buck, is professional development. That is something that all teachers have to do, that we may be able to get in high profile speakers or trainers to come in when they are doing their training at the beginning of the year. I think that is where we can get the most bang for our bucks, and maybe some other things we can do down the road.

Something we have been doing informally for the last few years is to have the chair and vice chair of each board getting together informally at restaurants to talk not only business but about family, about profession. That way when

these issues come up, it's not us against them. It's almost like a follow up when we have been meeting informally. I'm glad we have the relationship that we do, we have director our superintendents for the last couple years to look at those ways that we can work together. On that note the two superintendents, they are wonderful friends. I believe they have the same birthdays, they do things together and that helps as well.

**6. What's your view of the proliferation of high stakes standardized tests?**

I am all for being held accountable, but if there is one thing that I hear from teachers and parents is that there are too many tests.

Last year we had a community meeting at Clark Elementary school just to get out in the public, and that was the main thing they wanted. They [asked] what can we do to opt out of tests as a school system. To get that State and Federal funding, we have to [administer them].

We see these tests as a minimum standard, and we want to surpass those. At this point it is one of those evils, if you will, that we have to live with. If we didn't have to do it, I know when I was coming through Richmond Public Schools there was just one or two tests we had to do through our entire K-12 experience. Now it seems like we have those each year. It is just so much pressure on the kids, teachers and administrators for these high stakes tests. It's one of those things we have to live with, we are reducing assessments we have to do in preparation for those tests as much as we can. But we want to know where we stand, so we know what to focus on. In order to that we have to do some assessments but we are trying to reduce those as much as we can. We are giving the principals some flexibilities in that. This is just the first or second year we are doing it, so we will see the impacts of that. I'm not sure of too many people in support of these high stakes tests.

**7. Would you support the regular involvement of a non-voting student representative on your School Board?**

This has only come up a few times since I've been on board. I think we have been putting out too many fires and dealing with too many things to focus on this. But I would definitely be in support of it. I'm not even sure if this is something we have seriously investigated in the past, but I would definitely be in support of it. We unofficially get input from students now, when they see is, or various babysitters who are students at Charlottesville High School they are not shy at all letting me know what they think about various things. A perfect example is when we changed to the modified block schedule, 4 or 5 years ago, soon as it happened I got very detailed plusses and minuses from my babysitter. I was able to relate that at the meeting in clear details I would not have known, and we as school board members would not have known since we don't go through it on a daily basis. There would be some benefit to

that. The only downturn is that they would see that it is not all glamour when they go through a five or six hour meeting on a Thursday night. Some of the school classes now, they are required to attend school board meetings, and they have to attend one hour, and you know when that one hour is up when all the chairs shuffling and people are leaving. There is small handful of students that seem involved and stay on, and that may be where we get our representative from, but yes I would be in support of that.

**8. Charlottesville City Council has provided the school division with one-time funds to balance recent budgets. What steps should Council and the School Board take to help build a more sustainable school budget?**

You are going to hear this from all three candidates. We, as a result, over the last four five years we have gone to City Council to have them supplant the funds we did not get from the State and Federal Government. We didn't see us as a School Board being able to go through and cut again. And this year after we finished the budget it was determined that we would create a Blue Ribbon Panel, and they will have their second meeting this week. Hopefully they will come up with some recommendations that the school board in collaboration with City Council can use as we go into budget discussion for this year. Ideally this panel will complete their recommendations by the end of this year 2013, and we will have those.

As the school system goes in a locality is how the economy goes. We know there are people that are drawn here to this district because of the education system. We have several hundred people that pay to come to Charlottesville City Schools, because of the various offerings that we have and we want to sustain that. That is something that's a drawing it's a selling point to the City of Charlottesville and I think they understand that, that's why they have supported us. We know that is something they can't continue to do at the level they have because they still have the other part of the government to run as well.

So we are glad that this panel has been compiled, the people are wonderful people who have given up their time to input their expertise. It is a cross section of the community, teachers, educators, business people, parents, so we feel that the recommendations will be something, we are hands off- no school board members that are regularly involved on the panel- so we will let them do their work, whatever that may be.

**9. Do you support the grade reconfiguration plan for city schools such that Buford will house grades 6 through 8 as the only middle school? If so, how will that be funded and can it happen in your next term?**

I do support it. I'm not sure if it will happen in my next term. I think a lot will go to the previous question of what the recommendation of the Blue Ribbon Panel will be.

We are doing a major renovation of Buford School science lab, and that is something that whatever happens with Buford, that can be part of that reconfiguration of the school. It's not something we will have to go back in and change around or anything. It is a possibility of the school district, even though there is ten square miles where a child may have to change schools four or five times. That change in education is not necessarily a good thing. So we think that if we can get those changes to Buford, Buford needs to be updated. Regardless, nothing else, if we didn't do the MGG studies and things, Buford needs to be modernized. And we are modernizing the science lab but the other partner school needs to be updated as well. In order to do that, we need to make changes to all of the schools.

When we did the change I think in the 80s to move fifth graders out, we didn't have some of the Quest programs, we didn't have the preschool type of things, so we'd have to make some changes to all of the schools, and then change Walker, and then change the Central Offices, so there is a lot that we will have to do as part of that. I do support it; if it can happen in the next four years – that's undetermined at this point because the economy can turn around in a couple of years, and there is a lot of extra money available. It can happen, but that is not something to be honest that I have any control over, the School Board does not have any taxing authority. Each year is basically a zero-based budgeting for us because each year we have to go to City Council or get those funds from other sources. We have no other way than charging a couple of bucks for a hot dog to get in at a football game. That is primary way we have of generating funds.