



## **2015 Albemarle County School Board Candidate Interview**

*Candidate: Catherine Lochner (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 21, 2015 interview with Catherine Lochner (I). Other candidates in this open seat race include: Dolly Joseph (I) and Jonno Alcaro (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/](http://www.cvilletomorrow.org/topics/county_elections/)

### **INTERVIEW**

**Ms. Lochner, 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.**

Upon moving here, I really wanted to find a way to participate. I was still trying to get my bearings. We had moved here from Hawaii and so I was going through a bit of culture shock moving back. Not only to the east coast but some place really rural in my opinion (laughs). So I kind of thought about it and where I have spent the most time is what I was thinking and why was I doing that and it has always been education. Public education, specifically. My child has always been in public education. I was a product of public education.

So I started volunteering on all of the different committees that I could find. You know when you are new and you look at that parent guide that they give you at the beginning of the school year and you're thinking 'I could do that group, or I could do this group.'

So, one of my niches has always been special education. So I joined the special education advisory committee and as I got to know the county and the parents I also joined the PTSO at Albemarle High School, where my child goes, as the parent-teacher student organization. So it's nice to have a lot of different voices that were coming into the school and what they thought would make the school better.

And then I was like, okay, so I've always been attached to the school but what else can I do in the community? So then I discovered that there is a Ronald McDonald House here in Charlottesville so I started volunteering there, and I volunteered for about two years. So that was kind of me jumping into the community. And I think that's it, really.

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

Alright. So I have been a proponent of reading and math instruction, specifically methodology for reading, which most school systems, not just in this county, but nationwide, don't embrace a reading methodology. I feel that in many ways does a disservice to the kids. Most people come out of college with a teaching degree that actually is just techniques and we kind of an eclectic approach and I feel that actually leaves at least a quarter of our population unable to access how they are being taught every day. So if we start using methodology, you actually will reach all of the students.

So reading and math have really been a focus for me and will continue to be a focus for me.

But the other one I would have to say is special education. I do have a son who has impairments and he has been in special education or receiving services since he was in kindergarten so making sure that the county as we move forward has appropriately funded the needs and services for these kids to take part in all of their classes is going to be a high priority for me.

**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 actually came prepared to talk about early childhood, but I see you've thrown in there kind of a curveball in my opinion. So quality childcare is not really something that school systems provide. It's not in their purview. So child care to me is something that parents are still responsible for.

But yes, early childhood... I've had some struggles with that. Being a little bit more old school I have always felt that early education is something the parents should do. But as I have moved here, we have a much more diverse population and there is a need to have early education. I'm going to look up my notes here.

So something that I wanted to say about early childhood programs is that when we're talking about four-year-olds, I don't want to see programs that are all about rule following and sitting in seats and learning that 'B' [sounds like] 'buh.' I think that early learning should be all about kids interacting, having exercise, being outside, playing games. And I do feel that whether you are in pre-school or pre-K, those social and emotional skills developments are kind of those precursors to the collaboration and following directions when you're in the older grades.

So then there's also early education known as special education early education. Which in this state, I'm not sure if you're aware, this starts at 2 years old. So these programs really are set up for students that have significant impairments that we know if they enter kindergarten without any supports would not be ready. So they're going to in these programs are going to get intensive support with functional skills and therapies so they can develop properly. But I feel as a county, even though we have multiple programs for these children, it's been difficult to manage them and that's mostly because of the sheer size of our county mileage-wise and not the number of students that need the service. So it's kind of a delicate topic if you will. I also feel that without including these two and three year olds, self-contained programs really aren't going to get the job done. They need to be included with typically-developing peers and that would be something I would look at and focus on.

**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.**

Okay, so I have a bunch of things prepared. I'll just start with what I did write and then we can elaborate if there is time.

So, as far as the online courses that are part of this new requirement, I'm just going to tell you that I hate it. Point blank, it's just not something that I like. It puts a burden on the parents to teach children topics and skills that they themselves may not have ever learned. I also do feel it is a burden on localities to fund, train and implement courses that have not been fully vetted and I'm not quite sure the efficacy is really there. It is a hotly contested topic, I would say.

But I didn't want that to be confused with my own view of using technology in the classrooms. And it's not going to replace teachers. It's going to help inform their instruction. I absolutely love what they've been doing at the high schools which is using apps and programs in the classroom as instructional tools. I'm definitely in favor of that.

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

Wow, a lot of components to that one.

So yes, I do feel that we are recruiting high quality, high caliber teachers. But what I would like to say is that because we have not been providing the funding for the professional development for the last several years, there really is no upward mobility for these teachers and it has caused a lot of high quality teachers to leave and I have seen it just in the five years that I have been here.

As of the last August school board meeting that I attended, there was talk by the board that the incoming applicants are not as qualified. That is concerning.

So, you also want to know how do we know that we're paying them a competitive salary. Well, you look at labor market statistics, you look at what the other counties in the area are paying as well as what they are getting across the whole state of Virginia.

I would think that if you're just looking at the localities that border Albemarle County, we probably are actually paying them pretty well comparatively. I think something that we miss is the fact that we have so many students and our student population is growing. So there's that burden where teachers are teaching 20, 28 kids, sometimes 30 children in one class. That's difficult on a teacher and I think that their pay should be commensurate. But it's even more difficult to figure out what is appropriate at the high schools because they really are not held harmless to class sizes typically. Many of my son's classes have been what I would consider over capacity and I'm not just talking about the physical setting, but the sheer number of students that the teachers have to teach. As you know, they teach six out of eight or seven out of eight class periods. So the teachers are approaching 200 or more students at the high school level and that's significant.

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

Well, you know I came prepared with something completely different because I thought you were going to ask me about my own personal achievements and how that related to being qualified.

So I have to say that some of the answers are going to be a little bit off the cuff, but I did bring some statistics that are more geared to what's going on with our special education population.

So to tell you what I think is a problem or where the gaps are, which is still in reading and math. And these are basics. Why is this happening? We've been running public school over a hundred years. There should be no achievement gaps in reading and math for any reason and I think that's because we don't focus the supports when and where they are needed. I can tell you from a parent point of view that our middle schools absolutely are falling down on the intensive remediations and kids are showing up at high school unprepared. And that definitely needs to be a new priority, a new focus I would believe. That kind of goes hand in hand with the new requirements from the Virginia Department of Education.

So they have done away with the modified standard diploma. They are changing the requirements now for the IEP diploma or the certificate. So all, and I mean all, incoming high schoolers must attempt at a minimum the standard diploma and how are we going to do that with these students if we're not focusing on reading or math? We have sadly had programs where kids are literally not taught reading or math because of an impairment or some perceived non-capacity. And that is really unfortunate just to be nice. I could say a few other things. But that just shouldn't be and it has to be a priority as well. We are here to provide a public education. We are a public institution and so what every student needs is important to provide that so we can be a part of our community.

**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 thought about when you had given us the topic of city, county, UVA relations so I have seen where there are city collaborations with UVA or county collaborations with UVA. But me personally, I've not been aware of where all three entities are working together on an education initiative or an issue. I actually don't know if there is any one specific area where I would like to see all of these entities coming together. I'm kind of unprepared for that one.

**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?**

Well, CATEC certainly has gone through a lot of changes just in the five years that I've been here. I'm not exactly sure that we should be changing a city-county educational initiative and putting it on the ground of Piedmont. I think that people thought this might be something that would be a good idea going forward just because of the proximity of continuing that education instead of having to drive people back and forth because you are going to have high schoolers that want to do a technical education and may not be ready to jump into that four-year scene.

But I think having it at the current building where it's at as a neighborhood location, I personally like that. I've been kind of keeping a few loose tabs on what is the new strategic plan so I understand that they have two new programs that they're going to start this year which I think are wonderful and does give a nice rounding out, if you will, of options for our high schoolers. And I'd like to see that. It's always interesting how people kind of discern what they would like to see as pilot program and they don't always see it through for a couple of years before they add or change it. So I think from what I've read in the paper is they want to get it up and running, refine it, and then change it later on if it needs to be changed or anything like that.

I do have another option that I'm not sure has been discussed, or maybe I have just missed it is that because there are overcrowding with a couple of our schools and I hear Charlottesville City Schools are now also becoming overcrowded, we could actually change the entire purpose of that CATEC building and make it a public school and I would be thinking middle school. So that was my big brainstorm that I had last night but it's not completely thought out, but I thought that's a good use of the building.

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

Actually, not at this time. And I know a lot of people are going to be very upset that I said that. I'm not opposed to world languages. I myself have attempted to learn four different languages. My son is bilingual and my husband and my mother-in-law are bilingual.

But right now we are looking at cost. And it's like all the other electives. If you don't have funding you have to cut somewhere and since language is not really a requirement, I don't see the efficacy of that. Then you also have to look at what language or languages do we want to promote and I think even before I arrived here, the county had explored teaching different languages other than Spanish, which is currently being taught.

So how do you figure out based on the market what languages, and also giving parents a say in what languages they want their children to learn.

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

I would have to say that last year I believe it was we decided as a county to discontinue the safe schools, healthy students program. I am extremely concerned the increase in behaviors are not getting appropriate attention. There is that window or that opportunity for kids to start being seen as problems instead of showing them appropriate behaviors and modeling those. I don't think that we've ever had really well developed and what I call, PBIS, I love those acronyms, so Positive Behavior Intervention Supports. Across the 26 schools, we have 26 different ways in order to try these interventions. I don't see them working honestly. I see a lot of students that are still struggling and part of that positive behavioral intervention involves getting the parents to be engaged. It can't just be one-sided. And honestly, I don't just see the outreach to the families right now without programs. So that's a concern. That would be my one specific concern.