



## **2015 Charlottesville School Board Candidate Interview**

*Candidate: Adam Hastings (I)*

On November 3, 2015, voters in the City of Charlottesville go to the polls to elect their representatives to four seats on the Charlottesville School Board. This recording is Brian Wheeler's August 24, 2015 interview with Adam Hastings (I). Other candidates in this race include: Sherry Kraft (I); incumbent Amy Laufer (I); and incumbent Jennifer McKeever (I).

*The audio recording of this interview and complete election coverage is available on Charlottesville Tomorrow's website: <http://www.cvilletomorrow.org/cityvote>*

### **INTERVIEW**

**Dr. Hastings, 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 Charlottesville 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 Charlottesville School Board.**

Brian, I've been a classroom teacher, a department chairperson, a grade-level chairperson, a building-level administrator, a central office administrator, and now I'm out of K-12 education and I work in the next step which is community college education. I'm an educator and I'm starting now my 12th year in public education and I love it. The great thing about living in Charlottesville is that we're a small community. I've had a chance to really get to know the community, to really get to know the school system. I think I possess a knowledge of the Charlottesville City School system that most people who are not employees of the school system do not possess. And I'm excited to get in and do some work, both as a former teacher and former and administrator and now as a current parent of a future student of Charlottesville's public schools.

On top of that, my previous post was as the director of [the Charlottesville-Albemarle Technical Education Center], the CATEC Center Board is comprised of City and County school board members, and as the director, I had a chance to work very closely with school board members from both the City and the County and I can count them as my friends, I can count them as my colleagues, and I really appreciate the work that they've done, and I think I can contribute at a level that they've contributed.

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

I think we need to create a school system that has both short- and long-term financial stability at a level that can create educational opportunities for all students, similar to what is currently in place for those students who are engaging in work in the Sigma Lab, but that kind of innovation and education needs to be happening for all students. We need a funding formula and a budget and a financial situation that makes that a reality for every single student. I don't think we're there right now.

**And maybe you could add what the Sigma Lab is.**

It's the single most innovative thing happening in public education in Central Virginia right now. They have the best teacher, Matt Shields, who has turned Charlottesville High School from a school that was focused on sports and the fine arts to really a top science, engineering, manufacturing and making school. It's exciting, and it's something that is going to transform the way education happens at CHS. At its core, it's a bunch of rooms with a bunch of equipment in it, but what it's really going to be is a place where students approach learning in a whole new way, that uses their hands to get to their minds at a highly technical level that takes learning and really applies it in a way that we really have never been able to do in traditional education. It's happening there and it needs to be happening for all kids in all classrooms at all levels in all schools

**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?**

Absolutely. Pre-K education is expensive, quality childcare is expensive, but if we're going to create a school system that truly serves our community, they need to be in there. They need to be part of our approach to teaching the whole child and teaching the child from birth all the way through lifelong learning. To me, it's getting it as something that is part of our finances. It needs to be in the budget that is long-term funded. I don't know the answer as to where we get the funds right now, because we've been struggling with it as a community for years, absolutely for years. But I know that when our best-prepared students in our community are the ones who have had access to high-quality education from birth through schooling, when I know that that's been the situation for our best-prepared students, I know it's the answer for our least-prepared students. And we need to find a way to get high-quality education to those students as soon as possible, and I think pre-K and childcare are the answer.

I have a four-month-old, soon to be five-month-old, and childcare scares me. I don't know how my wife and I afford it, and we have college educations and great jobs. I can't imagine staring down, trying to find good quality childcare in this town if you didn't have the financial resources, and how your child could ever be prepared for school, because it scares me as an educator who has plenty of resources to make that happen for my child. I think that's something that we need to have available for all of our students if we really are going to have a community that we can all stand behind and really say is for all of our neighbors, and not just for a select few.

**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 can talk all day on this topic. My dissertation was on online education, on high-quality leadership for online learning in school. So it's a topic about which I'm very passionate, but it really boils down to something very simple. Technology can't replace high-quality teaching, but technology can enhance high-quality teaching. We live in a world that is changing in ways that we can't imagine. If you just think about it, we now have phones like they had on Star Trek where we can video chat with other people, and how much that is going to change between now and when today's kindergarteners are adults, we probably can't even fathom. I don't think comic books can fathom how much things are going to change.

As a result, we need to be creating a school system that prepares students for the inevitability of a technology-enhanced life. On top of that, we need to find teachers who can do that work. But at the end of the day our teachers have to be awesome

teachers, and if they do that through technology, terrific, and if they can't do that through technology, we need to have the resources to get them trained so that they can do that. We should never be looking to replace high-quality teachers with high-quality technology. We need to be integrated.

**5. 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?**

Yes, I do support the strategic plan of CATEC. I was very fortunate to be a part of writing that strategic plan, so I support it. We need to get to work. We're working now. PVCC is working heavily with CATEC, who is working heavily with Albemarle County and Charlottesville City. Career and technical education is something we need to work on locality-wide, statewide and nationwide. I personally would like to see it go a little bit faster, but as someone who has spent a decade in this business, I know things take planning and they take procedure and they take process. We need to be training our students to be able to get middle skill employment. Right now I think we have about 48 percent of our students are graduating with a standard diploma, and if a standard diploma does not prepare one for college, and a high school diploma is not sufficient enough to get students into high-quality employment, then we're missing something and we've got a gap there. And it's not just a skills gap, but a training gap. So we need to be training pathways, community career pathways that prepare students from K-12 all that way until adult education to get students access to great, high-quality jobs. Of course there are going to be some other changes. We need to have employers who offer those jobs, we need students who are willing to take those jobs, and we need parents and a community who support that kind of employment. But at the end of the day, yes, I support the strategic plan.

Whether or not it needs to move to PVCC is another question. It's been two years since we started that conversation. We were searching for solutions, and I think that the PVCC solution was awesome and Frank Friedman came out and said move it to Piedmont, it'll be great and we'll have it there. I think there's a logical, inherent connection between what goes on at CATEC, and what goes on at PVCC. I think we have some anticipatory exploration to do to ask if that's really the best use of public funds. Right now we have a hard time getting students enrolled in the current programs. Maybe we need to review what programs we're going to offer as they best fit our communities and then decide where that facility would go. I think facilities are a second choice. I think programming is the first choice.

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

We certainly are recruiting some top-notch, exceptional teachers. But since we don't have great performance measures of how our students are doing in schools, I couldn't tell you if every teacher that we hire is a top-notch instructor. I don't know the answer to that because we don't have a measuring stick that measures that. What I do know is that we have pockets of highly innovative, highly-energetic, highly-

successful teachers who turn out highly innovative, highly-energetic, highly-successful students. So we're having it. It's out there. But whether we're doing in wholesale, I don't know because we don't have that metric. Quite frankly, I don't think education schools are turning teachers with a skill set that we need to really push the needle on public education. I think public education is going to change in the next five years, ten years, twenty years. I don't think the traditional schoolhouse model is going to be there. I don't know what's going to be there, but I think we're changing so quickly, that knowing what I know after one year in higher education, I don't think we're nimble enough or flexible enough to be changing our teacher preparation to be preparing teachers to do highly-innovative work. That being said, we have some great teachers out there.

The way that you attract them is by creating two situations. One is a situation in which teachers can come in and use high-quality instruction and not be strung up with all of the red tape that goes with high-stakes testing and the things that come out the state in terms of our compliance issues and regulatory issues. Not that those aren't important, but we need to allow teachers to be innovative to be high-quality instructors, and that's difficult to do sometimes in the bureaucratic nature of working for a state organization.

The other scenario involves funding, and the reality of it is that teachers aren't paid what they need to be paid. I don't know the answer in the long-term of how we pay teachers what we pay doctors and lawyers. I don't think we're going to figure that out probably in my tenure on the school board, but the reality is that we ask an awful lot of our teachers, and we don't pay them at a level that is commensurate with other people who do that category of work in our society. I think what we can do as a school board is create a teaching environment and a learning environment where teachers feel supported to be innovative, where they feel encouraged to be innovative and where they're recognized for the work that they're doing in the classroom. And that's going to go a long way.

I think that what's happening in the Sigma Lab, and what's happening at Buford and what's happening in the fine arts, I think that teachers, in pockets, know that if you want to go and be excellent at what you do, Charlottesville is a great place to be, but we need that in every subject area in all of our schools.

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

Our achievement gaps don't start in our schools, they start in our society. We have a community of have and have nots, and I don't think that as a community we recognize everyone as neighbors. I don't think that we agree that we are all successful when we are all successful. I think it's easy to turn a blind eye at some of the prosperity that our neighbors do and do not have, and some of the levels of success that our neighbors do and do not have. That achievement gap starts out in our community. It's there. It's ever present. I saw it today as I walked over here for this interview, and that heads into the schools. And our students, while they may be at separate schools at a young age, as they move into the middle school, where we

funnel everybody through the same conduit and then back out, it's stark when you walk into our school system and see what our students are coming with, both on a material financial level, but also just on an academic preparedness level. When we're not coming in on equal footing, it's hard to come out on equal footing.

I think the way we solve it as a community is to look at the whole system, but in the next four years as a school board we're not going to revamp the entire school system. But I do think that early childhood education, pre-K, childcare, is going to start the creation of a scenario in which all students are coming into kindergarten on equal footing, ready to learn, ready for literacy, ready for numeracy. But it also means that we have to reach the current strategic plan goals of having a school system that partners with our community where we as schools and we as families work to create a really strong community.

The really great thing about Charlottesville is that we're so small, we only have one high school, we only have one middle school—if you count Walker we have two—we only have one middle school system. The great thing about our size is that we have the ability to do whatever we want. We don't have that many masters in that town. We can choose our own destiny, whereas a larger school district I think would have a harder time with that. But I think we're going to have to make a conscious decision, an effort for those students that start in our system, we need to create an educational program for them so that they come in on equal footing and they have a chance to keep growing through that the whole way. But it's going to be a long time coming. It's not a one-year solution. If anything, if we start in kindergarten, it's a 13-year solution.

That requires a lot of long-term stick-to-it-ness, a lot of community focus, and I think in this community we have a lot of issues that pop up a lot, and we have a lot of issue fatigue. I think we deal with an issue for a while and then we say 'alright, we've dealt with that one enough, let's move on to the next.' I think the success of our community rests on whether we can solve the have and have not issue. That plagues us, and our school system can be a major player in that, but we have to start and we have to stick with it. We have to do it at a generational level, and there's a lot of real work to be done there.

**8. 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 this is a place where we could work from a teacher's standpoint to attract really high-quality teachers. Let's keep it in the pre-k realm. So at UVA we have Bob Pianta at the Curry School, and he is the top early childhood education researcher, period. He and Bridget Hamre work together and they churn out the best, highest-quality research on early-childhood education there is. We have two school systems that both have a tremendous need for early childhood education program improvements, both in quality and quantity, and we have a need to attract and train teachers who can do that work, both from the traditional teacher corps, and the folks

who are working in hourly wage positions now who just need training to move pre-k programs from less of a daycare model to more of a school model.

I'm the first one to tell you that at that age, we don't need to be cramming reading down the throats of two-year-olds and say you need to be preparing for your SATs. I think play is huge and let's just be kids, but there's a science to this. There a way that we train people, there's a way that we work with kids to get them school ready and there's a way that we train faculty to really be high-quality educators.

We have the research base. If we can get the funding together, we can really build out the schools and the pre-k options. And then as we go to recruit faculty and teachers we have that group. If we can put those together and work together and train together and share lessons with each other, I think it could be a really cool model where we work with all kids in our community. We certainly don't have the facilities set up right now at a place where we have one big center where all of the kids can go. It's going to be disjointed, it's going to be a system of efforts, and I think there's just no reason why, if we're doing this in both divisions, and we have the expertise at the University, that we just don't do it together. Especially with other for-profit institutions in town who do that work, plus we have some high-quality preschools in town who do that work. Creating that kind of community around pre-K in our community would be pretty neat. It would be fun work, quite frankly.

We're already doing it at other levels. We do it with our higher-level engineering, our higher-level dual enrollment. We do it there where we work together, we jointly apply for grants, we go after joint funding, so we recognize the importance of that, so I think we need to take that muscle and apply it to some more emerging issues.

**9. GRADE RECONFIGURATION: 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 recognize that this is a hot button issue and that we have a community that values its schools as community schools where our schools have the flavor of their communities and that they really embody what goes on in different areas, even in a place that's as small as Charlottesville that we have distinct pockets of communities and identities. In this case though, as somebody who went through a traditional 6-8 middle school program, and as a former education researcher who looked at it, our nation, even though the pendulum swings, our nation is pretty clear that 6-8 middle school education is how we should be doing middle school education. So in that regard, I really support centralizing middle school in one place.

I'll add two final reasons on to that. The first is transitions. Teenagers stink at transitions, and when our students have to go from school to school to school to school, it's almost like, we think about a student who has to switch schools along their progression and the kind of trauma that puts a child through, where they have to learn a whole new lay of the land, a whole new set of faculty, they lose their advisors, they lose their counselors, they lose their support staff, limiting those

transitions, to me, is huge. So if we can consolidate to a system where students attend one elementary school, one middle school and one high school, I think that will help students as they navigate their own educational system.

On top of that there's the funding issue. We pay to run two physical plants, two sets of administration, two separate wage employees who operate two separate schools in this district, and if there's a way we can consolidate from a funding standpoint to make one more financially responsible decision to run one middle school, I'm in full support of it.

If it will be funded, I think it part it gets funded by trying to approach a cost-neutral scenario where you reduce one school and funnel that funding into one new school. I think though that if all we do is close Walker and open Buford and don't make any changes to Buford, then we're not going to see any improvement, and so there needs to be an approach to say 'not only are we going to consolidate the schools, but the school into which we consolidate the students is going to be a school that every single student wants to go to, and every single parent wants to send their student to. No slight against the faculty and staff of Buford, but I don't think that you can say that right now, and I think we need to spend some time making Buford a world class middle school. In that case, I don't know where the money is going to come from, but the National Science Foundation and the National Institute of Health and a whole bunch of other foundations are out there to support that work. I think it's time that we make that decision and work toward having a real top middle school. I think we have a top high school and some top elementary schools and we have a good middle school, but I think we need to move to the point where the middle school is an equal-sized jewel in the crown. It's time.

I don't know enough about school board operations, even though I've spent a lot of time with school boards, to know if that's realistic in four years. We're a community that values deliberation, we're a community that values process, that values collaboration and people getting involved. We've been working on the Belmont Bridge since I've lived in town, and I can't imagine if we can't agree on a bridge, how much time it would take to agree on changing a school. That being said, we have the faculty right now, we have people, we have the expertise from the teaching level, we have the expertise from an administrative level, we have some new change coming to both the City Council and School Board, I think this would be a very ripe time to go forward and to move and do this work. But people are going to be reluctant, because if we just keep things as is and we just close a school, nobody is going to buy in.

**10. BUDGET / BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION FOR SCHOOL FUNDING: What steps should Council and the School Board take to help build a more sustainable school budget?**

My wife was on the Blue Ribbon Commission, so I got a very close up look as to how that worked. Honestly, to me, it's a short answer. Follow the steps in the Blue Ribbon Commission Recommendations. We went out, we found the right minds to work on the problem, we found a solution, we proposed a solution and then we took



the solution and we put it on the shelf. So if that is our best attempt at how we find financial stability and fiscal stability for our community, then that's what we need to do. It's frustrating, I think, to be in a situation where we go do the research, we do the work, we put it out to the community, we get input, we get right to the starting line and then say 'you know what, let's just think about this a little bit longer.'

I think it's time we make some decisions. We have some big issues around finances, we're going to consistently get to the local composite index and the revenue sharing and all those issues, but if we can't fix our own internal issues on finances, I think it's going to be very difficult to approach the broader issues that affect the University's involvement and the County's involvement. I think the answer is you follow what it says in the Blue Ribbon Commission report. And if we don't like what it says, then we need to be honest with ourselves and ask if we had a different set of objectives, and if so let's publish those and flesh them out and get community feedback and go forward.

Or, and I don't want to do it, if that Commission wasn't the right group of people, then we need to get the right group of people in the room. But right now, and maybe I'm biased because I heard at least over the dinner table some of the internal workings, I think they did a good job. I think they brought the right people together to look at the situation and I think that it's time. I will say that I have tremendous confidence in our current superintendent and Ed Gillaspie and the people who are doing the finances for the school division, that if we can marry that with what's in the report, we've got to do it. We can't keep asking our question of how we find financial stability, coming up with an answer, and then not enacting it.