



2015 Albemarle County School Board Candidate Interview

Candidate: Brian Vanyo (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 4, 2015 interview with Brian Vanyo (I). Other candidates in this open seat race include: Michael Basile (I) and Graham Paige (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. Vanyo, 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.

I think I have a number of experiences that I'm fortunate to have had that I think qualify me for this position. First of all I have a pretty diverse academic background. I'm a graduate of the United States Naval Academy, the U.S. Naval War College and UVa Law School. I also served in the Navy for nine years, deploying to Afghanistan and Iraq during that time. I currently work at the Defense Intelligence Agency, where right now I'm part of an effort to improve how intelligence supports acquisition programs amid increasing demands and decreasing financial resources.

There are a lot of parallels there for the challenges that face the school board today. I've written a book about our political and constitutional history, I serve on the board of a small nonprofit, an educational organization that works to educate others, mainly children and young adults about the importance of the Constitution. And probably most importantly I've had the wonderful experience of being a husband and father of three girls, two of whom are school aged and are in the county public school system.

I think all of these experiences have really helped shape who I am, and I think I would probably bring a unique perspective to the school board. But above all I don't think there's any one experience that I can say most qualifies me for the board, but I can say that put together, my demonstrated commitment I guess to public service and learning about issues that concern the public probably prepare me the most for this. And you know I certainly have concern for the future and the direction our country is going, and I know that public education plays a role in shaping that future, so I certainly would like to be a part of it.

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

I would like to see the school board improve its communication with residents about some of the program initiatives that are going on in the schools, and also to help provide some of the reasoning behind some of the decisions that are made with regard to the budget. I know a lot of parents simply don't have time to follow all of the school board meetings and the deliberations that are going on. And the school board's website does provide a lot of information, but I think that could be improved, certainly because the school board is entrusted with the majority of the county's tax revenue, and so the Board should make every effort to inform residents how and why money is being spent. And I think that with more disclosure and communication parents and citizens can be better informed about what's going on in the school district, and it might encourage more involvement, so I think that's something the Board ought to improve upon.

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 this is one area where I think I respectfully disagree with the business leaders and social service agencies who believe this, because I've read a number of reports, and certainly the most comprehensive study was the Head Start Impact Study, which I think was done in 2010 or 2011, which shows that pre-K education really has no lasting effect on educational achievement for those students who go to preschool.

I've also heard a number of people say that even if there are no lasting benefits there are social benefits, and that there are correlations between preschool and lower incidences of crime. But that study doesn't show that, and again, this study is one of the most comprehensive studies ever conducted on preschool education. I think there is a much greater impact on educational achievement and social behavior effects, the greater correlation is family dynamics. I've seen studies that show single-parent households, that the children of single-parent households are more likely to have lower academic scores and are more prone to crime just because there isn't that level of bonding between the child and the mother that typically exists between two-parent households. So on this issue, I would not make pre-K education a priority. I think it should be available for those who want it, but I would not seek to expand it.

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 agree that it's important for students to learn about technology and to become familiar with it, because we live in an age where computers are so present in our lives, and I also agree with the point that teachers should not be replaced by online courses, because there just haven't been enough studies to determine the benefit of that type of education. I do think online learning can be a good tool to have in the classroom because it can allow students to learn at their own pace, so it can assist students in that regard, and I think we ought to welcome opportunities to bring technology into the classroom for that use, but certainly there is no replacement for a teacher, and I think that technology is simply just an aid that can be used to the benefit of student learning.

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

I think we are recruiting the best teachers, and I think we do also have competitive salaries. I've seen some reports that say that pay for Albemarle County teachers is in the top 10 percent in the state. I think we know that we're getting good teachers

because the student scores, the achievement level is much higher than state averages, so I think that those are ways that we determine if we're getting good teachers and I think that we are. How we measure those teachers, I think I would defer to the administrators to make those decisions, but I know that we should not be tying teacher performance to standardized test results because I've seen a lot of results that show there really is no correlation between standardized testing and how teachers perform, so I certainly would oppose that kind of performance measurement, but I would defer to the administration on 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 going back to some of the studies I've read, the performance gaps seem to be driven primarily by family dynamics, and that accounts for race, income. It seems like the largest determinant for academic performance is whether or not parents have a stable family environment in which their kids can grow, and if they are involved in their child's learning. I don't think that there are a whole lot of ways that schools can impact that, but I think educating some of the older students as they grow, to show them some of these studies and the impact that family can have on future generations, so I think I would encourage that kind of education in the schools.

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 know that UVa has done a lot of good work with STEM cooperation with the schools, and I think that is, I know my daughter participated in an event that is hosted by UVa, STEM for girls. I think exposing children to those kinds of opportunities in science, technology, engineering and math ought to be improved and we ought to look for opportunities to increase exposure to those fields. So that's how I would look to expand those types of relationships.

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 do support the strategic plan of CATEC. I think it offers a lot of great courses to help facilitate technical learning for jobs in industries in this area that are in high demand. I know that the new Health, Medicine and IT Academy at CATEC I pushing toward are good initiatives, and that the instruction doesn't overlap with Monticello and Albemarle High School with those academies. So I think the strategic plan is a good one, but I would probably wait on my decision to build a facility at Piedmont because I know those academies at CATEC are relatively new, and I think people just want to see what the outcome is and what the effect is on academic achievement.

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

I think I would. I've seen a lot of studies on the positive impact that languages have on academics, and a child's learning ability. My daughter is actually at Cale Elementary and she's in the two-way immersion program, so we get to see how that works. So far it's been a positive experience for her and we're excited that she gets this opportunity. And I know that, especially in some of our areas of Albemarle County, that there are a lot of ESOL students, so when we have that dynamic, it seems to make sense that we ought to leverage some of these two-way immersion programs to not just help the English speakers, but also make it easier for those ESOL students to acquire the skills they need to learn English as well.

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

I think I'll answer this by saying all of the above, because I know that the Albemarle County School Board has faced a lot of significant budget challenges for the last seven years, going back to 2008, since the budgets have seriously declined. I've looked at the budgets going back to 2006, and if you adjust the budgets for inflation, the budgets have basically flat lined over the last eight or nine years, while student enrollment has increased by about 800 students. That presents significant challenges for the administration and the school board to try and manage that increase in students with the same amount of money effectively. So I think that every part of the budget would have to be scrutinized to ensure that the programs we have in place have a direct effect on academic performance.