

MELINDA ROGERS

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What are your specific qualifications for this office? I am a parent to two Virginia Beach City Public School students and one graduate. I am a former paralegal with years of experience in the legal field. I am also an educator with over a decade of experience, including five years with Virginia Beach City Public Schools. I've had the opportunity to demonstrate my commitment to diverse student populations, from gifted learners to those in special education and Title 1 classrooms. I am not a politician, but rather a uniquely qualified and passionate advocate for my community.

What is the most important issue facing the city schools, and how will you address it in office?

The top challenge facing Virginia Beach City Public Schools is achieving a budget which prioritizes staff and student needs. This year, the division has a budget of nearly \$1.2 billion, yet we still face shortfalls regarding salaries, benefits, and capital improvement projects. These are in part a result of fiscally irresponsible budgetary practices. When elected, I will review the budget and vote for priorities which reflect the values of VBCPS, which is putting students first. Students need safe buildings, and a sufficient amount of faculty and staff. We cannot give students necessary resources without the budget to do so.

What are your three main policy priorities for Virginia Beach schools?

- I will advocate for policies that meet the needs of every student, ensuring equal access to the high-quality public education they deserve. I aim to address current shortcomings to meet the specific needs of Virginia Beach students. By keeping the focus on our community, we can ensure that the concerns of our students, staff, and families take precedence over politics.

- To guarantee the highest quality of education for students, emphasis in the school budget should be on staff retention and commitment to being responsible stewards of the funds entrusted to

us. Recognizing the nationwide staffing crisis in education, my goal is to motivate Virginia Beach City Public Schools employees to remain dedicated to our institution.

- In this school year, the division has a budget of nearly \$1.2 billion, yet we still face shortfalls within classrooms, leaving teachers to purchase critical supplies. We fail to provide sufficient resources and staffing for our students, leading to increased class sizes and an inability to maintain our infrastructure. These circumstances are a result of fiscally irresponsible budgetary practices. When elected, I will critically review the budget and vote for budgetary priorities which reflect the core values of VBCPS, which begin with putting students first.

How can the city schools address concerns about equality and inclusion? The school division's focus should shift from equality to equity and inclusion. Recognizing that each student has unique needs, it is essential to move away from providing the same resources to every student and instead concentrate on delivering tailored support. This approach ensures that each student receives the specific tools and opportunities they need to thrive academically. Prioritizing equity means fostering inclusive environments for students of color, ex-

panding opportunities for those pursuing alternative post-secondary paths, providing targeted resources for students in special education and gifted programs, and creating learning environments that cater to all ability levels.

Is the district doing enough to address school security and discipline? Discipline traditionally refers to training students to follow rules and comply with authority. However, I believe that our focus should be on fostering critical thinking rather than mere obedience. That said, it is essential for the division to enhance both security and behavior management within our schools. These improvements include securing safe entry points for both staff and students, particularly during recess, increasing the availability of mental health professionals to address emotional dysregulation effectively, supporting staff in managing students with needs that exceed typical classroom resources, and ensuring that students are placed in environments where they can achieve their fullest potential.

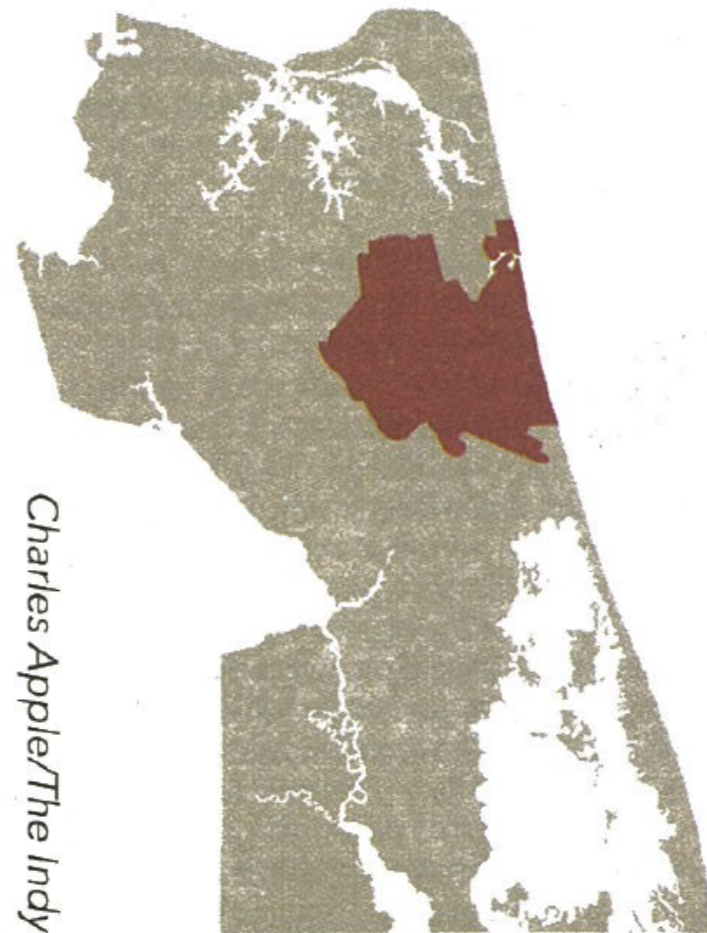
How will you help the School Board prioritize the significant challenge of teacher retention and recruitment? The school board can enhance staff retention and recruitment by prioritizing a budget that supports competitive pay and benefits. Employees want to feel valued by the division and to have their voices heard when making requests, such as improvements to the academic calendar or access to essential resources. Our staff seek positive working conditions, including well-maintained buildings and buses with air conditioning, as well as the ability to perform their duties within their contracted hours. Additionally, they should be compensated for mandatory trainings. By placing a strong emphasis on staff needs, VBCPS can become a desirable place to work, ultimately benefiting our community's children through smaller class sizes and the support they deserve.

Do you support collective bargaining? I fully support giving staff a voice in matters related to their contracts, working conditions, pay, and benefits. To retain high-quality personnel, VBCPS must make a more concerted effort to listen to their concerns and prioritize addressing them.

Arguably, the School Board has been more effected by district voting than the City Council, which has faced challenges in court this year. Do you support the 10-district voting system? Why? I fully support the 10-district voting system, as it ensures dedicated representation for District 5 on the school board, with a sole focus on advocating for our students, staff, and families. I believe that equitable representation is vital to ensure all stakeholders have a voice in decision-making. As both a

teacher and parent who has worked and volunteered in multiple District 5 schools, I understand firsthand the importance of having someone who champions our district's unique needs. This system will greatly benefit our entire community.

This is a district election. Only registered voters who live within District 5 in Virginia Beach vote in this race.



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