

The Coalition for a Responsible School Board

The following non-partisan survey has been prepared to present your qualifications and ideas to the voters. At the same time, it will help you review the policies, procedures, and issues with which School Board members must be thoroughly familiar.

Openness, honesty, and reasonable disclosure from candidates are necessary for an electorate to be informed and therefore able to make a rational and thoughtful political choice. To further the goals of public awareness, electoral civility, and an open democracy, the Coalition for a Responsible School Board suggests the following guidelines.

Recommended Campaign Practices

The Coalition asks candidates and their supporters to:

- refrain from negative advertising**
- respect the right of the public to know:**
sources of all campaign funding,
stands on issues, and
other information relevant to the election.

Some materials and endorsements which further the campaign may not be required by law to carry the authorization of the candidate. However, we recommend that:

- Candidates accept responsibility for ALL materials produced with their knowledge and/or tacit approval, and**
- Candidates publicly reveal endorsement from any group which provides money, in-kind donations, advertising, printed material, or other materials helpful in the campaign.**

The Coalition for a Responsible School Board

School Board Candidate Questionnaire

The Coalition is nonpartisan and believes that the public has a right to know where a candidate stands on issues. The items chosen for this questionnaire represent general issues commonly faced by most school boards as well as matters of current specific interest to Albemarle County residents. The Coalition does not judge the value of any candidate's answers, nor does it comment on content. The Coalition simply releases the candidate's **photocopied, unedited responses** to the media, Coalition members, and to the general public. In this way, the Coalition questionnaire may replace multiple requests for information from these groups.

Copies of responses are also made available at Coalition forums and may be the basis for much of a forum's discussion.

The following areas are covered by this questionnaire:

- I. Biographical Information**
- II. Budget Priorities and Concerns**
- III. Curriculum**
- IV. Gifted Education and Special Education**
- V. Present School Board Priorities**
- VI. Redistricting**
- VII. Safety and Discipline**
- VIII. School Choice, Vouchers, Home-Schooling**
- IX. Values, Religion in the Schools, Family Life**
- X. Open-Ended Questions**

Please consult the Albemarle County website at *www.k12.albemarle.org* to access all policies and budgets.

The Coalition does not place a minimum or maximum length on candidate responses. However, the Coalition believes the public is best served by answers that are concise and clearly written.

Candidates are asked to **use black ink for legibility to return a reproducible completed questionnaire by September 5th**. Information will be released to all media and the public by **September 17th**.

Mail or drop off materials to:

**The Coalition for a Responsible School Board
c/o John Baldino
1924 Arlington Boulevard
Room 222
Charlottesville, VA 22903**

I. BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Name: Brian Wheeler

Address: 89 Langford Place, Charlottesville, Virginia 22903

Phone: (434) 984-2233 **home**
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bwheeler@albemarlematters.com
http://www.wheeleronboard.com

Phone and e-mail numbers will not be released unless authorized by candidate.

Sign here to release phone and e-mail information: _____

Education level: Graduate of the University of Virginia (Col '90), B.A. in Government and Foreign Affairs

If you have children, please complete the following:

<u>School(s) Attending/Attended</u>	<u>Graduation Year</u>
Sam Wheeler	Currently in Second Grade at Murray Elementary
Abby Wheeler	Currently in Sixth Grade at Henley Middle School
	Graduated from Murray Elementary June 2003
<i>Both children also attended Children's Montessori School for four years each (pre-school-Kindergarten)</i>	

Previous School Board or education-related experience of any type:

- Mentor, **Computers4Kids**, Charlottesville, VA, 2002-Present.
- PTO President (2002-03) and PTO Vice President (2001-02), **Virginia L. Murray Elementary**, Albemarle County, VA.
- Representative, **Albemarle County Schools Parent Council**, 2001-03.
- Member, **Albemarle County Principals Screening Committee**, 2000.
- Co-Director of Adventure (camp counselor and rock climbing instructor), **Highlands Camp & Conference Center**, Highlands, NC, Summer 1987.
- Graduate, **National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS)**, Wyoming, Summer 1986.

Occupation: Chief Information Officer & Managing Principal

Employer (or self employed): SNL Financial, Charlottesville, VA (<http://www.snl.com>)

Type of business: Publisher of financial information and news.

Number of years you have lived in Albemarle County: Nineteen. I moved to Charlottesville in August 1984 from Atlanta, GA to attend the University of Virginia. My wife Jean and I were married in 1990 and over the years we have lived in Crozet, Troy, the Fieldbrook subdivision and now in Langford Farms near Ivy, Virginia.

The League of Women Voters asks that you include a **biography of no more than 50 words** to be published **along with your answer to Question 3 on page 8** in the League's *Voter's Guide* in the *Daily Progress*. You are also asked to provide a **photograph** for this purpose.

Brian Wheeler is a graduate of UVA and works as Chief Information Officer at SNL Financial. Brian has been a parent activist since 1999 and has created a website and over a dozen e-mail newsletters to help educate the public about education and community issues. Brian has two children in Albemarle schools.

You may also attach a separate sheet to this questionnaire listing any additional volunteer and/or work experience you would like to include. [See attached]

II. BUDGET PRIORITIES and CONCERNS

A. The School Board is responsible for developing a budget based on the needs of the educational system and the resources available from the federal, state, and Albemarle County governments. The Board of Supervisors is responsible for determining the local share of the budget.

The School Board budget process usually begins with the County Administrator providing a preliminary estimate of available local funds to the School Board. In the last few years, the School Board has submitted to the Board of Supervisors a budget that exceeds the County Administrator's preliminary estimate of projected local funds. (This is commonly referred to in the media as an unbalanced budget.) Please comment on this process.

I firmly believe the School Board's responsibility is to instruct the Superintendent to prepare a needs-based budget that will achieve the priorities and goals of the division. Board members and candidates who state that they will never approve a funding request that exceeds expected revenues are playing politics and turning a blind eye toward the needs of our schools.

In the past four years, I have attended more budget hearings, work sessions, and School Board meetings than all the other candidates running for School Board combined (excluding school staff and current board members who are running). As a result, I am very prepared to

be an advocate for education to the Board of Supervisors. The Supervisors approve the County budget, and 60% of County funds go to the schools. Revenue projections from the County Executive are just that, projections. The School Board's role is to be an advocate for the full needs of the division. At the end of the process, the budget has to be balanced by law.

The Board of Supervisors needs a School Board that it can communicate with and that demonstrates strong leadership and wise decision-making. The State's support for education is woefully inadequate. Until such time as that situation changes, Albemarle's School Board and Board of Supervisors have to work together and take educational funding matters into their own hands. Albemarle County residents also do not want to trade things that enhance our quality of living in Albemarle, like the acquisition of conservation easements, in exchange for education funding. Likewise, our schools shouldn't have to trade compensation improvements for adequate classroom staffing.

B. Listed below, in alphabetical order, are many significant budget items. Please comment on as many of these or other budget items as you wish.

- Adult Education

- **After-School Programs**

We should eliminate barriers to PTOs and parent volunteers who want to try and create after-school programs in their community. I believe many PTOs have been discouraged from offering programs or been led to believe that they would have to create their own non-profit corporation to do so. It is possible to work within the after-school enrichment program, but the School Board should push to make this process more efficient as it is a great way to offer additional educational experiences and involve parents in their children's education.

- At-Risk Programs

- **Building Maintenance**

Our buildings look as great as they do because we maintain them in an impeccable manner. One has to be impressed with the amount of renovations and improvements that were completed on a very tight schedule this Summer.

- **Buses (replacements)**

I think our staff should be commended for their work maintaining our bus fleet, for their safety record, and for their bus rotation program that helps extend the useful life of this equipment. Their efforts have allowed Albemarle to use a 13-year bus replacement schedule, lower the number of regular buses in use since 1998 from 165 to 136, and maintain a high quality fleet. Extending the bus replacement schedule past 13 years seems unwise, particularly when the state recommendation is 12 years.

- **Capital Improvement**

The next school board will oversee many major capital improvement projects, including the following: an addition at Henley Middle School; a new Southern Elementary School; an auxiliary gym at Monticello HS; preparations for a new Western Elementary and a new high school; and regular upgrades of equipment and instructional technology. I believe my experience with capital equipment budgeting and purchasing,

as well as my experience as co-project manager for all of SNL Financial's major building and relocation projects over the past 6 years, will be very valuable to the School Board. The most recent of these construction projects was the \$5 million renovation of the former National Ground Intelligence Center in downtown Charlottesville during 2002-03.

The School Board's Long Range Planning Committee has played a central role in analyzing facility needs and redistricting. This committee, however, needs to be used more effectively by the School Board. In November 2002, the School Board held its first ever joint meeting with the Committee. The Committee has received little direction during 2003 since it submitted a redistricting framework this past March.

When I have an opportunity to appoint someone to the Long Range Planning Committee, I will select a person who is very knowledgeable about County planning issues, who has a good understanding of the needs of our growth areas, and who can be a valuable resource for the School Board's work on redistricting and capital improvement projects. Both the School Board, system staff and the Committee need to work effectively with the County's Planning Department and Board of Supervisors to review accurate data on growth and development to ensure a well-informed capital improvement process. The County's Comprehensive Plan needs to be maintained and revised to reflect the desires of the community for neighborhood schools. Educational needs should be addressed early in the master planning process for each of our growth areas.

- **CATEC/Vocational Education Programs**

Our programs are an excellent alternative for those who want to enter the workplace with valuable skills after high school.

- Curriculum Development and Materials

- **Differentiated School Funding**

I support differentiated funding, which makes additional teaching positions available to schools with a higher percentage of children eligible for free and reduced lunch, but only after the establishment of a reasonable baseline class size and the provision of adequate staffing at all schools.

- English as Second Language (ESL)

- **Fine Arts (art, band, strings, choir, drama, photography, etc.)**

Funding for fine arts has often been left behind as a lower priority item. Sometimes a PTO or parent leader can help fill the gaps with an after school program or through the funding of a special assembly for the school, but that does not ensure a coordinated approach that integrates the fine arts into our schools year after year. For example, if we make a commitment to a middle school strings program, we should ensure we have the resources to continue this program successfully in high school. Our gifted fine arts students should not feel like their only choice for pursuing music is at Charlottesville High School or in private lessons, it should be in every one of the COUNTY's schools. Until this system has access to additional revenues however, the continued support of new programs like strings or the construction of an auditorium at Monticello are going

to continue to end up on the back burner.

- **Gifted Education**

Since I declared I was running for this seat on the School Board, gifted education has been one area that I have received a steady stream of feedback that we need to make additional improvements. While Albemarle County has made many improvements in our programs for high achieving students, this is an area I want to ensure gets additional attention from the School Board. We need to challenge students at all levels. For high achieving students, we need to ensure they are given a rigorous and challenging curriculum which exposes them to advanced content and opportunities for independent study that meets their individual needs. Advanced placement courses should not be over-enrolled, weakened and turned into status symbols for college applications or school progress reports. They should be rigorous and prepare students to pass the AP exams and receive college credit.

- Guidance Counselors
- Library Materials

- **Murray (alternative) Charter High School**

I have been impressed with the results achieved by Murray High School and it plays a very valuable role in our school system as a charter school.

- PE/Health (elementary, middle, and high school)
- Piedmont Regional Education Program (PREP)

- **Professional Development**

Teacher stipends for professional development need to be restructured and funded at a higher level by the School Board. Until this school year, the professional development stipend for our teachers had remained at \$100 since 1987. In approving the 2003-04 budget, the School Board finally instructed staff to develop proposals to restructure professional development stipends. The school system should create larger pools of funds and allow teachers to apply for them. Teachers could be allowed greater choices in course offerings that suit their professional development interests. Our teachers would have enhanced opportunities for training and expanded knowledge to bring to our children if we increase the stipends and the flexibility of their use. I would like to review the recommendations from staff for the 2003-04 school year to ensure that we aren't just dividing up the same pool of funds such that they are now going to even fewer teachers because they are eligible for more than \$100.

- Programs for autistic, profoundly learning- or physically-disabled students

- **Reserve Fund**

I believe the School Board needs to set money aside in a reserve fund as part of its annual budget. This could be phased in with a goal in the range of .75-1% of the operational budget. The practice of dipping into the individual school's operational funds and holding them hostage throughout the school year should stop.

- School Nurses
- Special Education
- Sports (including funding for existing and proposed teams)

- **Technology**

Given my professional career in information technology over the past 13 years, I have a good understanding of the technology used in our schools and in the business community. I understand that resources have to be dedicated to training and supporting employees in their use of technology. I understand that investments have to be made to secure and protect our network from outside threats (e.g. worms, viruses, hackers) to ensure the continuity of business and employee productivity. I will use my skills in these areas to assess our technology plans and I will support budgeting for a replacement cycle for our technology hardware and software.

I commend staff for their initiation of the Design 2004 program which has sought to implement and create some best practices with the use of technology in instruction. The results I have seen are very enriching classroom experiences that have brought tremendous creativity into the classroom and given students great hands-on projects with which they can learn valuable skills. Design 2004 is an example of a program that is not simply teaching to the test (i.e. SOLs).

- Textbooks (new and replacements)

C. Compensation:

1. Presently, a teacher's pay is based primarily on years of experience, college degrees, and duties. What do you consider important in determining a teacher's salary?

While it is quite different from my experience in the for-profit sector, I support this scale methodology for determining teacher salaries, as it is the generally accepted practice in school systems nationally. In my company, compensation decisions are made as part of an ongoing goal and performance review process that integrates company priorities, performance metrics, incentive plans, merit bonuses, and regular reviews of our salary structure based on the competitive market for various positions. Education is a different type of business, a business that is harder to quantify and measure as compared to the for-profit sector where one team or department has substantial control over the financial success or failure of their division. As a result, I recognize salary decisions have come to be made in a much different way in our schools.

I do believe, however, that competitive compensation requires regular performance evaluations. I will insure that policies are in effect and being followed to conduct these assessments. The public should be confident that our principals and administrators are conducting regular and effective evaluations as part of the building of an excellent school system. I would be open to exploring modifications to our compensation approach that would create additional "lanes" in the scale that would serve as incentives for teachers with different advanced degrees and levels of performance.

I favor the raising of employee salaries above the mean of our competitive market. If we expect exceptional schools, then we should expect to have to pay for them. We

know Albemarle has a bubble of teachers reaching retirement age, as does the rest of the state. We know Albemarle has a high turnover rate for new teachers. Competitive compensation is what we will need to attract and retain the best teachers for our children. The competitive market should be just that. It should reflect the systems we are truly competing with for teachers and administrators and be made up of counties with a similar cost of living. Our compensation should reflect our performance expectations and our accomplishments.

2. Please comment on pay scales or schedules for administrators and for classified school employees.

As with teacher salaries, the school system should establish a competitive market to guide in the establishment of salaries for administrators and classified staff. At a minimum, we should support cost of living adjustments for the classified scale, and that has not always been done in the past in Albemarle. As with teachers, I believe that competitive compensation requires regular performance evaluations.

3. Please comment on the benefits package provided for employees.

One of the strengths of our overall compensation package are our benefits, which are among the best in the state. I have participated in my firms review and selection of medical benefits for our 270 employees. I know how much the specific priorities vary for each employee and I know the rising costs of insurance present tremendous challenges to Albemarle County.

III. CURRICULUMS

The following concerns **what is taught** in Albemarle County schools. Curriculum guides are available for each grade and class at each school and in the Central Office. Questions concerning the curriculums of Family Life and Vocational Education are covered elsewhere. **Please provide your comments, including any recommendation for changes to these curriculums:**

I don't have specific suggestions for changing our curriculum at this time and much of the content is required by the State's Standards of Quality. The School Board ensures that the Superintendent has hired professionals in each of these areas who can make sound recommendations to the School Board. I look forward to participating in the review and improvement of these materials as a board member and I would welcome all feedback from parents in this area.

A. Elementary School Curriculum

- Computer Skills
- Fine Arts (music and art)
- Foreign Language (currently a school option)
- Language Arts (reading, spelling, writing)
- Math

- PE/Health
- Science
- Social Studies
- Other

B. Middle School Curriculum

- Computer Skills
- Foreign Language
- Fine Arts (art, band, choir, drama, strings)
- Language Arts (reading, spelling, writing)
- Math
- PE/Health
- Science
- Social Studies
- Exploratory offerings
- Other

C. High School Curriculum

- Business
- Computers and Technology
- Foreign Language
- Fine Arts (art, band, choir, crafts, drama, strings elective)
- English
- Math
- PE/Health
- Science
- Social Studies
- Vocational
- Electives
- Other

IV. GIFTED EDUCATION AND SPECIAL EDUCATION

Please **provide your comments**, including any recommendations for changes to the following:

A. The Gifted Program's five-year plan for Albemarle County is submitted by the School Board to the State Department of Education.

Please see my comments above related to gifted education.

B. The Special Education programs of Albemarle County are outlined in various plans

submitted by the School Board to the State Department of Education and to the federal government. **These plans include mainstreaming practices and inclusion.**

V. PRESENT SCHOOL BOARD PRIORITIES

The School Board annually adopts a list of priorities. Please refer to the “**Albemarle County School Board/Superintendent Priorities for 2002-2004.**”

A. Identify those priorities from this list that you think are most important for the long-range improvement of the school division, and explain your choices.

I agree with the bulk of the School Board and superintendent priorities as revised for 2003-04. They set the bar high for our school system and the Superintendent must ensure that these priorities are reflected in the individual school's improvement plans. A number of these goals, however, will only generate reports for the board without making implementation and funding a specific goal. Reports include: a long range plan for a K-12 World Languages program; a report on division compensation structure; and a report documenting K-12 plans to increase access to higher-level classes for high achieving students.

Certainly the School Board needs information from staff before it can make a decision on a major new initiative. However, those of you who have followed the school budget know that many new initiatives often never come close to receiving funding because we are constantly struggling with existing funds to pay competitive salaries and maintain effective classroom sizes, and occasionally even those two regular goals are pitted against each other. After all, eighty percent of the school budget is for people.

A goal of my campaign for School Board is to ensure Albemarle has the resources to carry through on priority program recommendations, without losing ground in other areas. I want to be on a School Board that can receive a report with strategic recommendations, reach a consensus, and actually implement or modify a program, not one that puts the report on the shelf and doesn't demonstrate the leadership necessary to make the recommendations a reality. How? One way is to get the public demanding more from the state. If the state paid its fair share for even the minimal standards of quality, Albemarle would have almost \$2 million more annually for other initiatives.

B. Is there anything you would add to or delete from this list? Explain.

Here are some specific priorities I think need more concerted effort by this School Board:

Priority 2.1 -- Equity and Diversity

"2.1.1 By June 30, 2004, a staff member in each school will provide building-based equity and diversity workshops and specific focus on closing achievement gaps in core academic areas."

It is going to take more than equity and diversity workshops conducted by one staff member in each school, who already has a full-time job, to close the achievement gap, the difference in average test scores between whites and African Americans and between those eligible for free and reduced lunches and those who are not. The achievement gap is a national problem and there is no silver bullet, but I think Albemarle has the resources and the talent to demonstrate how it can make significant progress towards closing this gap, and more specific plans are needed in this area immediately.

Priority 2.2 — Division Salary Structure

"2.2.1 By December 2003, a staff committee will convene to analyze and make recommendations on the current compensation structure to the Board."

In November 2002, the School Board was given a report by the County's HR department that informed them the compensation data used in the 2002-2003 budget was flawed and that those teachers with the most experience in Albemarle were on the losing end of that mistake. The Board was encouraged to reevaluate the methodology of its compensation plans, to look at the average of the competitive market instead of the median. They were told we were falling behind even the median in four of seven steps assessed on the report, a number brought down by many low ability to pay counties in the competitive market the Board agreed to use.

In November 2002, when the School Board could have directed Superintendent Castner to take action and make adjustments in his preparation of the 2003-2004 budget, they took no action. They gave no direction on changing the competitive market.

A needs-based budget should reflect the true needs we have for establishing competitive compensation. If we want to attract and retain the best teachers, we have to be willing to pay for them. If we want our teachers to be able to afford to live in the community in which they teach, we have to have a market that reflects the cost of living in Albemarle. Otherwise, they are going to move elsewhere.

A new School Board will have been just elected when this December 2003 compensation report is presented to the Board. Let's hope the current and future board can take action in time for the 2004-2005 budget.

Priority 3.1 — Students/Schools Passing the Standards of Learning Assessments

"3.1.2 By June 30, 2004, specific focus will be placed on assuring academic success on SOLs for middle school students that is comparable to elementary and high school students."

This School Board received a major report on the status of our middle schools in August 2001. I would like to know which of the 21 recommendations in that report have been implemented. For those that have been implemented, did we get the expected results? Do some initiatives need improvement or more support? For those that have not been implemented, is the budget an obstacle?

VI. REDISTRICTING

The School Board, in response to past redistricting issues, is planning to increase the size of many schools. **Please comment on what you believe are the optimum and maximum sizes for elementary, middle, and high schools. Also comment on any of the issues listed below, or others that you believe to be important.**

- **Length of time a student spends on the bus**
- **Cost of transportation to school system**
- **Keeping present neighborhoods together**
- **Grandfather clauses to keep siblings together and accommodate Seniors**
- **Sending elementary students to same middle school**
- **Sending middle school students to same high school**
- **Increasing the time between required redistricting**
- **Socioeconomic balance among schools**
- **Academic ability balance among schools**

I support the current maximum sizes set by the School Board for our elementary, middle, and high schools. Based on the testimony I have heard at School Board meetings, I believe instruction is not negatively impacted by school populations at the upper end of these limits. That said, the School Board needs to ensure that we have adequate facilities to support the actual enrollment at all of our facilities.

My first priority in reviewing any redistricting proposal will be to minimize change for as many families as possible and to redistrict the County as a whole as opposed to looking at the elementary, middle and high schools separately. Those goals are not mutually exclusive. A comprehensive redistricting should allow for better long range planning and thus minimize the potential for multiple redistrictings for a family. I support grandfathering with transportation provided by the County.

Other redistricting priorities in no particular order:

1. Clear communication to families impacted and their school community. No new proposals should ever be added to a redistricting plan after a public hearing is held by the School Board or Redistricting Committee, unless subsequent full public hearings are granted (i.e., public comment at a School Board meeting does not count).
2. Explore alternatives to new building construction. When a new school is built, families more readily accept redistricting because they understand an EMPTY school needs to be filled and the cohorts of children are usually sizable (the children move with many of their friends). It is more difficult to find families willing to be redistricted into a school that is under capacity. However, in a county like Albemarle that is growing in areas where the infrastructure has not necessarily been built, residents have to understand that redistricting is a necessary tool. It is also fiscally responsible to explore alternatives to the building of new schools. Alternatives might include redistricting to Albemarle schools that are under capacity; increasing the capacity of our existing schools; increased cooperation with the City of Charlottesville; and/or the development of magnet schools--all the time keeping my highest priority of minimizing change for as many families as possible.
3. Minimize or eliminate split feeder patterns in any new redistricting proposals. Any split deemed to be necessary should have a substantial cohort of children.
4. Annually assess our school capacity based on the use of the building. This annual review process was adopted by the School Board in 2002. Redistricting can only be done with clear numbers on capacity and enrollment projections.
5. Promote neighborhood elementary schools. This statement requires the acceptance of redistricting as a tool and support for new school construction in our growth areas. An effective long range planning process should make it clear when those facilities are needed.
6. Trailers or "learning cottages" are a stop-gap solution and not where we want our children to be learning.
7. I think if you pursue the priorities above, the transportation issues (time on bus) are mitigated (i.e. we use redistricting as a tool and we support neighborhood schools). However, time on the bus should always be assessed as a redistricting decision factor, as should the safety of certain roads or railroad crossings required in any school's bus route.

VII. SAFETY AND DISCIPLINE

The following questions concern student **safety** and the roles of **teachers, administrators, and parents in student discipline**. Please respond or comment on each of the following:

- A. What would you propose that could improve the **safety** of students at their schools and on the buses?
- B. **Policy JFCD/JFCD-R includes the rules for expulsion** for students found in possession of knives or other weapons. In your comment, please address the issue of zero tolerance and its practical application.

- C. **Under present Policy JGE, students expelled** by the Albemarle County School Board do not receive services from the school division during the time of expulsion (unless they are special education students, as required by law). However, current practice is that most expelled students are provided alternative educational services through the Enterprise Center.
- D. What are your views regarding **school uniforms**?
- E. Please comment on student conduct relating to **drugs and alcohol** as stated under **Policy JFC**.

VIII. SCHOOL CHOICE, VOUCHERS, CHARTER SCHOOLS, AND HOME-SCHOOLING

Albemarle County pilot programs and state laws address school choice, vouchers, charter schools, and home schooling. Practices include:

- A. Currently, all students within the same school district boundary are required to attend the same school as assigned by the School Board.
- B. Present Virginia state law prohibits the use of public funds to provide vouchers for tuition to private schools.
- C. A middle- and high-school pilot program (**Policy JECB--“Non public-school access”**) allows students who are **home- or privately-schooled** space-available access to regular school classes.
- D. Albemarle County allows for the creation of **charter schools** under **Policy LC**. Murray High School is a charter school.

Please comment, including any recommendation for changes to the above and other practices or laws concerning school choice, vouchers, charter schools, or home schooling.

I do not support the use of public dollars to create vouchers or tax credits for families to pay for private education. In large urban school districts with failing schools, vouchers may be a useful tool. In Albemarle, our success and our focus on excellence at all our schools make the choice for Albemarle families an easy one—anywhere you choose to live in Albemarle, a good public school is available to your children. Regarding open enrollment, I don't think Albemarle schools should allow families to choose the school they wish to attend. Were that possible, redistricting decisions would be all that more difficult to implement and plan.

- E. What are your views on the need and the usefulness of creating **magnet schools** in Albemarle County?
I think magnet schools should be explored, particularly before the construction of the next

comprehensive high school. Magnet schools could be part of a joint effort with the City of Charlottesville that might help the County build fewer new schools.

IX. VALUES, RELIGION IN THE SCHOOLS, FAMILY LIFE

Albemarle County policies address **values, religion, and instruction about family life**. Policy manuals can be found in every school and the Coalition provides copies of those policies mentioned below. Some of these polices are:

- A. School Board Regulation INDC, "The Minute of Silence."**
- B. School Board Policy INDC/INDC-R (specifically, page 4 of INDC-R) which prohibits teacher-led or other officially sanctioned prayer.**
- C. School Board Policy IGAH/IGAH-R and accompanying regulation, "Family Life Education," concerning parent and student options and alternatives.**
- D. Family Life Curriculum** as adopted by the School Board. (Curriculum guides are available in every school.)
- E. The School Board policy concerning the Pledge of Allegiance.**

Please provide your comments, including any recommendations for changes to these and other policies concerning values, religion in the schools, and family life.

I believe in the separation of church and state. I am opposed to the teaching of creationism. I am comfortable with the statement "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance, just as I don't object to the motto "In God We Trust" being on our legal tender. However, I don't support the hanging of posters proclaiming "In God We Trust" in our schools, paid for last year by the religious right and approved by Governor Warner. This is an effort to insert more religion into our schools.

X. Open-Ended Questions

Please respond to each of the following. You may outline answers. The Coalition suggests you title your answer with the question as presented. All answers will be **photocopied and released unedited. The Coalition never comments on candidate responses.**

- 1. Why do you want to be a member of the Albemarle County School Board?**

In 1999, my daughter landed in a second grade class of 27 children. That is a lot of young kids for one teacher. I raised my hand at the PTO meeting and asked, "What are we going to do about this?" I wasn't satisfied with the answer. That led me to create an internet e-mail newsletter and website focused on Albemarle schools. I collected information about class size and the budget and shared it with parents around the County. I earned the respect of

school administrators and elected officials because I stuck to the facts and wasn't an alarmist. Within 6 months, we engaged the School Board, the administration and ultimately the board of supervisors to get more funding for education. The School Board adopted my proposal for class size emergency relief and it has been in the budget helping schools around the County ever since.

Thus, I want to run for School Board because I will play an important role improving what is already a good school system. I want Albemarle to have an exceptional school system. I have lived in this area for nineteen years and I am ready to put my substantial business experience, and my experience as a parent leader in this school system, to work for Albemarle.

My campaign is an effort to ensure that the School Board continues to improve our public schools, invests in recruiting and retaining the best teachers, challenges our students at all levels, ensures small elementary class sizes, and embraces and funds new technology to improve instruction.

Growth in Albemarle brings many challenges to government and it is rapidly changing the face of our community. We need to elect people who can protect what is great about Albemarle, and public education needs our attention. This School Board needs to focus more energy on long range planning, policy development and ensuring we have the means to be successful, and less on divisive distractions.

2. What do you see as the primary purpose(s) of the School Board?

The primary purpose of the School Board is to represent and implement the public's vision for education in our community in accordance with the laws of the Commonwealth. As such, it focuses on policy and strategic goal setting, which includes the setting of academic standards and measurements for accountability. We have a wealth of staff expertise and exceptional central office managers. The School Board's job is not to micromanage these employees or our teachers, but to manage and evaluate the Superintendent. It is the Superintendent's job to operate our schools and implement the jointly established Superintendent/Board priorities and goals. The School Board also serves as education's key advocate on behalf of the students and the community.

3. Please comment in 200 words or less on the three most important issues you see the School Board facing in the next four years. As noted on page 3, the League of Women Voters will publish your response to this question in their Voter Guide.

I see three critical issues:

Recruiting and retaining teachers—I want to have a motivated, dedicated, talented teacher in every classroom. If we want exceptional schools, we have to be willing to pay for them. Competitive compensation and benefits will help retain teachers and recruit new employees in the face of a growing number of retirements and a teacher shortage.

Increased funding—This School Board will have to work harder than ever to motivate the public to demand support from Richmond when it comes to funding and improving the minimal the Standards of Quality. Since this will not be an quick fix, the Board must also work with the Board of Supervisors to secure local funding and to explore alternative sources of revenues that will allow us to achieve our goals (e.g. the creation of a charitable foundation).

High stakes testing—This year's senior class has to pass the SOLs to graduate. While 90% of our students will graduate, what is our systemic response going to be when 10% do not? How can we close the achievement gap? How can we balance high stakes testing with our goal to challenge students at all levels and teach beyond these tests?

4. What do you see as the **specific responsibilities of a School Board member in the daily operations of the schools?**

The School Board should have a very limited role in the daily operation of our schools. We have a wealth of staff expertise and exceptional central office managers. The School Board's job is not to micromanage these employees or our teachers, but to manage and evaluate the Superintendent. It is the Superintendent's job to operate our schools an implement the jointly established Superintendent/Board priorities and goals.

5. Describe the type of **relationship** you want to have with the **Board of Supervisors** and explain how **you intend to create** this relationship.

I will be an advocate for education to the Board of Supervisors. The Supervisors approve the County budget, and 60% of County funds go to the schools. The Board of Supervisors needs a School Board that it can communicate with and that demonstrates strong leadership and wise decision-making. The State's support for education is woefully inadequate. Until such time as that situation changes, Albemarle's School Board and Board of Supervisors have to work together and take educational funding matters into their own hands. Albemarle County residents also do not want to trade things that enhance our quality of living in Albemarle, like the acquisition of conservation easements, in exchange for education funding. Likewise, our schools shouldn't have to trade compensation improvements for adequate classroom staffing.

I know most of the Supervisors (and candidates running for Supervisor) very well. I believe they respect me because they know I do my homework and I am responsible with my communications in the media and to the public. That gives me the foundation for a very close partnership with the Board of Supervisors when it comes to supporting public education.

6. Describe the type of **relationship** you want to have with the **Superintendent**, and explain how **you intend to create** this relationship.

The relationship I will build with the Superintendent will be the same relationship I would build with any employee. It will be based on clear and honest communication. It will include regular feedback on performance. It will include jointly setting specific goals and priorities for the division. I have a very good working relationship with our Superintendent

today and I do not expect the transition to be difficult should I be elected to the Board. To further develop this relationship, I commit to learn as much as possible about the educational, legal and financial issues before the Board and to be prepared for all Board meetings.

7. What do you see as the **role and value of public opinion and public hearings** to the School Board?

Public opinion and public hearings are critical to the work of a school board. All citizens have a stake in public education and thus they should have a voice in the process. I would like to see more regular public comment from student leaders. We should encourage the contribution of ideas and opinions from students, staff and citizens. As a School Board member, I will continue to use technology to improve communications and to improve our board meetings so that information is more readily available to the public in attendance and at home.

8. Describe the **responsibilities of the school in supporting parents** and the **responsibilities of parents in supporting the school**.

Parent involvement is a two-way street. One of the things I hear that frustrates me the most comes from middle school and high school parents who say: "We are not welcome at our school"; or "Only 4-5 people come to our PTO meetings." I want all our schools to be welcoming and to encourage parental involvement, not only because it makes them better educated customers of public education, but because it is genuinely good for their relationships with the children and for their children's education. If the schools support that—through outreach, regular communication, school improvement committees, and the Parent Council—we all win.

Schools need to actively solicit parental feedback on teachers, programs, facilities and curriculum. Parent-teacher organizations (and our teachers themselves) need to be relied upon a lot less to fund the basic materials that we need in each classroom.

9. What do you think **guidelines for class size** should be in elementary, middle, and high school?

The School Board monitors class size through an annual class size report. I would like to see slight improvements in the K-5 staffing ratios, and/or the addition of additional emergency staffing positions, to ensure schools with low free and reduced lunch populations have the resources required to address class size bubbles. As part of the budget process, I will request staff present recommendations as to how this can best be addressed.

Emergency staffing is something I proposed in 2000 as Class Size Emergency Relief and which the School Board has approved every year since. Emergency staffing should be expanded well beyond the 2 positions in the current budget and applied only to regular classroom needs. For example, twenty-seven students is too many for an elementary classroom, and adding TAs and making use of differentiated instruction is not an acceptable

alternative. It should be much easier for an elementary school principal to take 2 classes of 27 children and create 3 classrooms with 18 children. The current formulas are too rigid and make it difficult for a principal to hire the best teachers before the start of school. I will work to ensure all our students have a learning environment conducive to success.

The U.S. Department of Education goal is to have average class sizes of 18 children in grades K-3. Albemarle is close, but has some room for improvement. I would not support any proposal to increase our baseline class sizes.

10. What should be the role of a School Board member in textbook adoptions, curriculum development, and selection of library books and library resources?

I think the School Board should provide oversight in this area and be responsive to the public's concerns. The School Board should rely on content and educational experts on staff to recommend appropriate materials.

11. Policy GCD addresses teacher recruitment, retention, and goals. Current practice allows teaching contracts to be offered early to highly recruited and qualified candidates. Do you support current policy and practice? What changes, if any, would you propose concerning recruitment of minority teachers and administrators?

I would like to see the teachers in our classroom reflect the diversity in our community. I am very excited to have recently learned about the independent **African-American Teaching Fellows** project. This eight-year pilot project will seek to identify African-American high school students in our area that have a strong interest in becoming teachers. Additionally I think we should make every effort to "grow our own" teachers from our minority Teaching Assistants. The assignment of a mentor to each new teacher in the division will contribute to increased retention.

12. Many controversial areas are covered in the following School Board policies: INDC/INDC-R, "Religion in School"; INB/INB-R, "Teaching about Controversial Issues," IB/IB-R, "Academic Freedom," and IGAH/IGAH-R "Family Life Education." If any of these have not been covered in previous questions, what would you add, subtract, or keep the same in each of these policies?

13. The public currently has the right to appeal administrative decisions to the School Board. Are there any changes you would recommend in how the Board handles appeals? Are there any categories of appeals that should end with the principal or with the superintendent? If so, please explain.

14. What should the schools, parents, and the community do to prepare non-college-bound students for work after high school?

15. An academic performance gap exists within our general student population. In terms of state laws (SOLs), this may result in students not graduating and schools failing to gain accreditation. In terms of federal law ("No Child Left Behind"), it could result in loss of federal funds and other sanctions. What do you propose the school system do, if anything,

to narrow or eliminate this performance differential?

The achievement gap is a national problem and there is no silver bullet, but I think Albemarle has the resources and the talent to demonstrate how it can make significant progress towards closing this gap, and more specific plans are needed in this area immediately. The current board priority in this area is not specific enough and I think the Superintendent should communicate more specifically to the Board and the public the steps that should be taken to ensure a 100% pass rate on SOLs and the closure of the achievement gap.

16. Currently, part of a school's budget allocation is based on the number of students in special populations. **Do you support the present criteria and formulas used for determining differentiated funding?** If not, what would you change?

The school's staffing allocation formulas are quite complicated, so much so that I created a web page just to explain differentiated funding allocations for parents (See: <http://www.wheeleronboard.com/docs/differentiation.htm>). I support the goal of getting additional resources to children that need assistance. However, differentiated funding should only be allocated after we set a reasonable baseline class size AND provide resources for grades that have unusually large enrollments.

17. As a School Board member, what would be your **relationship with school division staff and teachers?**

I will maintain professional relationships with our employees. Having served on a number of non-profit boards with paid staff, I am very familiar with the distinct roles for board members, employees and the CEO or Superintendent. If an employee has a concern, I will encourage them to speak with the supervisor first. I will always be open to their ideas and will value their feedback on my performance as a School Board member.

On the School Board, I will be an advocate for our employees and for excellence in their work. I will not be a skeptic of their actions or motivations and I will not publicly embarrass any employee. I will help celebrate the success and dedication demonstrated by our employees. The School Board only hires the Superintendent and the School Board clerks, but it must look out for the needs of all system employees.

18. Please explain your thoughts on **lengthening the school day, the school year, and on "year-round" schools.**

I would be open to lengthening the school day if it was recommended in order to support a School Board priority or goal. For example, Yancey Elementary recently extended its school day to provide extra learning time and I hope this will contribute towards Yancey becoming a fully accredited school next year. If the School Board extends the school day, it must be prepared to compensate the system's employees accordingly for the additional work.

I do not believe public support exists for a year-round school calendar, but I will keep an open mind should this be reviewed by the School Board.

- 19. Various groups with direct interests in education often endorse School Board candidates.** These groups may be teacher political action committees (PACs), parent or PTO PACS, tax groups, political parties, and other interest groups. Please discuss **your feelings toward endorsements and in-kind and/or monetary contributions from such groups.**

I would accept campaign donations or endorsements from a like-minded interest group that was involved with and knowledgeable on educational matters. I would not accept campaign donations or endorsements from a partisan PAC or a political party. School board races are non-partisan (the political parties do not place candidates on the ballots and our party affiliation does not appear on the ballot). Candidates that do accept such endorsements get tremendous advantages come election day, but I think they are running against the spirit of a non-partisan School Board.

- 20. The School Board establishes positions concerning issues before the state's General Assembly and Senate.** Please review the most recent **"Legislative Package of the Albemarle County School Board"** and comment.

- 21. The School Board has a variety of practices and policies concerning racism, sexual harassment, and religious intolerance.** Would you change these? If so, how?

I support the current policies in this area, including our policy of non-discrimination related to sexual orientation which was added in December 2001.

- 22. Please evaluate the benefits and disadvantages of cooperating with other school districts.**

One advantage is it allows to get access to best practices and compensation and expenditure data.

- 23. Please comment on academic grouping practices.**

- 24. What are your views on early childhood education, including the Bright Stars program and Head Start?**

Early intervention is a critical and necessary tool if we want to address achievement gaps and ensure success in school, and success in life, for all children.

This is the last page of the School Board Candidate Questionnaire.

You may also attach a separate sheet to this questionnaire listing any additional volunteer and/or work experience you would like to include.

BRIAN WHEELER

RECENT EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Feb 1998 – Present	<u>Chief Information Officer</u>	SNL Financial LC Charlottesville, VA
Feb 1997 – Jan 1998	<u>Network Administrator</u>	SNL Financial LC
May 1990 – Jan 1997	<u>Grants Manager & Information Systems Mgr.</u>	W. Alton Jones Foundation Charlottesville, VA

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

Virginia Piedmont Technology Council (VPTC), Charlottesville, VA 1999-2001
Member, Board of Directors

Telecommunications Cooperative Network (TCN), Arlington, VA 1996-1997
Secretary and Member, Board of Directors

- Appointed to serve as Board member of TCN, a technology cooperative with 4,500 members nationwide.
- Liaison for the W. Alton Jones Foundation, a TCN member, in a strategic partnership that has delivered TCN's expertise in communications and information technology to many of the foundation's grantees via technical assistance projects.

ONE/Northwest (Online Networking for the Environment) 1996-1997
Seattle, WA
Member, Advisory Board

- Appointed to serve on the advisory board of a new organization working to promote electronic networking in the Pacific Northwest environmental movement.
- Worked with ONE/Northwest's founder, Paul Brainerd, former president of the Aldus Corporation and the creator of PageMaker, to promote more effective use of technology by non-profit organizations.

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE (CONTINUED)

Highlands Camp and Conference Center—The Mountain, Highlands, NC 1988-1991
Vice President and Member, Board of Trustees

- As a Board Member, gained valuable experience with board-staff relations, capital projects, policy development, budget evaluation, and personnel management.
- Initiated a review of the long-range planning process and of The Mountain's mission statement. Served in a period of significant board involvement during a transition between Executive Directors. Participated in the hiring and evaluation of the Director.

Appalachian Search & Rescue Conference—Charlottesville, Virginia 1984-1991
Member

Held leadership and management positions in volunteer search and rescue team supervising up to 100 volunteers and professionals. Served as an Incident Commander managing all search operations, logistics and planning for downed aircraft and missing person searches.

Western Albemarle Rescue Squad—Crozet, Virginia 1986
Emergency Medical Technician (EMT-A),

CAMPAIGN CODE OF CONDUCT

MARCH 2003

- My guiding principles for this campaign, and for service on the Albemarle County School Board, shall be hard work, honesty, integrity, responsible communications, non-partisanship, promoting what is in the best interests of our children, and having fun.
- I shall listen to all constituents, be responsive to their concerns, respect their opinions and have the courage to vote my conscience to serve the best interests of our children's education.
- I shall respect my fellow candidates and board members.
- I shall follow the Virginia School Board Association's code of ethics for board members.
- I shall respect all employees of Albemarle County Public Schools.