

## JW Abney – Questionnaire Responses

1. 'm not a career politician. I'm a community member who got tired of watching decisions get made about our schools, our workforce, and our families by people who aren't actually connected to them. I spent years working inside St. Mary's County Public Schools as a Technology Support Professional running the IT department. My wife is a school counselor at a middle school here in the county. Education isn't an abstract policy area for me. It's personal and it's daily. On top of that, I've spent 20+ years in IT, cybersecurity, and Department of Defense work. I know how to analyze a problem, look at the data, and build a plan that actually holds up. Southern Maryland needs representation that combines real community roots with the analytical background to get things done. That's what I'm bringing to District 29C.
2. First: Workforce pipeline alignment. We have a significant gap between what our schools are producing and what employers actually need, including federal contractors, the defense sector, and healthcare. I'll push for stronger career and technical education (CTE) pathways starting in middle school, and I'll measure success by tracking post-graduation employment and training outcomes, not just college enrollment numbers.

Second: Mental health and counselor ratios. My wife sees every day what happens when students don't have adequate access to counseling. Maryland has improved its ratios, but we're still not where we need to be. I'll advocate for funding to bring counselor-to-student ratios in line with national best practice standards and push for transparent county-by-county reporting so we can see where gaps remain. There's also the issue of the social workers in the school losing their jobs when the grant ends that will have negative impacts on students in crisis.

Third: Technology infrastructure and cybersecurity in schools. I ran the IT department for SMCPS. I know firsthand how underfunded and underprepared school systems are when it comes to protecting student data and maintaining functional learning environments. I'll work to ensure state technology funding is tied to real infrastructure standards, not just device counts. I'll engage educators directly, not through press releases, but through listening sessions, school visits, and working with MSEA. Success gets measured by data, not talking points.

3. Early and often. I've seen what happens when legislation gets written without educators in the room. You end up with mandates that sound great in Annapolis and create chaos in the building. My approach is to consult before the bill is drafted, not after it's filed. I'd establish regular communication with MSEA and the local associations, bring educators into the conversation at the committee level, and make sure that anyone writing policy about what happens inside a school has actually spent time inside one. I have. I know the difference.

4. The Blueprint is ambitious and the intent is right. We need systemic investment in education. But ambition without accountability is just spending. My concern is that implementation has been uneven, and smaller, more rural school systems like St. Mary's County are struggling to absorb the requirements without the administrative capacity to execute them well.  
On state aid for K-12: it has to be the priority. Full stop. Community colleges are also critical for workforce development in Southern Maryland and I support funding them adequately. When I'm at the budget table, I'll push back on proposals that fund other state programs at the expense of the education line. That's not a values statement, that's fiscal accountability.

5. No Response

6. I worked alongside ESPs every day. The folks keeping the buildings running, feeding kids, driving buses, and supporting students with disabilities are not a secondary workforce. They are essential to whether schools function. The privatization threat is real and it undermines both the quality of service and the stability of the community workforce.

Policy priorities: I'd support legislation establishing minimum wage floors specific to ESP classifications, anti-privatization protections that require school boards to demonstrate cost and quality analysis before outsourcing, and equal access to professional development funding. These aren't radical ideas. They're baseline workforce standards that most private sector employers already have to meet.

7. The rollback of protections at the federal level means states have to step up. Maryland has an opportunity and an obligation to codify protections in state law so that federal policy shifts don't determine the safety and rights of our students and educators.

I'll support legislation that explicitly protects immigrant students' rights to education regardless of status, that maintains anti-discrimination protections for LGBTQIA+

students and staff at the state level, and that funds legal resources for school systems facing federal pressure to comply with policies that conflict with Maryland values. I was a DoD contractor. I understand federal leverage. The answer is building state-level protections, not waiting for federal policy to turn around.

8. This is the issue I hear about most from my wife's work as a school counselor. The pandemic didn't create the mental health crisis in schools. It exposed and accelerated one that was already building. The research is clear: counselors, social workers, and school psychologists deliver measurable outcomes. The resistance is usually budget-driven, not evidence-driven.  
My positions: fully fund the Blueprint's mental health staffing requirements and hold counties accountable for actually filling those positions. Expand trauma-informed training for all school staff, not just counselors. And don't overlook educator mental health. Burnout is a retention crisis and a public health issue. I'd support state funding for educator wellness programs as part of the employment package, not an afterthought.
9. Housing and education outcomes are directly linked. The data on this is not ambiguous. When teachers can't afford to live in the counties where they work, you lose them. When students are housing-insecure, their academic performance and attendance suffer. Southern Maryland has a housing affordability problem that's getting worse, not better.  
I work daily with first-time homebuyers in St. Mary's County and I see the affordability barrier up close. The systemic problems are: insufficient workforce housing inventory, zoning that hasn't kept pace with population needs, and a lack of state-level coordination between housing and education planning. I'd support workforce housing tax incentives, state investment in attainable housing near employment and school centers, and requiring housing impact analysis as part of school construction planning. Educators need to be able to live where they teach.
10. Maintain funding at current levels for private schools - Public dollars need to deliver public accountability. I'm not interested in expanding funding to institutions that aren't subject to the same standards as public schools. I'd maintain current funding levels but tie any future increases to transparency and accountability requirements. Voucher programs that redirect money away from public systems without accountability are not something I support.

11. Support - If a school takes public money, it operates under public standards. Accountability follows funding. Any institution that wants to discriminate while accepting taxpayer money is asking taxpayers to fund discrimination. I won't support that.
12. I'll use my background in IT and infrastructure to push for school facility standards that actually get enforced. Too many school buildings in Maryland have air quality, HVAC, and structural issues that affect both learning and health. I'd tie school construction and renovation funding to occupancy and health standards, require transparent public reporting on facility conditions, and push for faster remediation timelines.  
On workplace safety for educators: I support clear, enforceable standards for class size, student behavior intervention protocols, and physical safety infrastructure. Teachers and staff have a right to work in an environment where the systems around them are designed to support them, not just survive each day. Far too many staff members have to use personal money to buy fans and heaters in our schools just because HVAC is always an issue.
13. Support - Cutting prevailing wage to save money on school construction is a false economy. You get lower quality work, less experienced tradespeople, and projects that come back for expensive remediation. I support prevailing wage requirements and I'll vote against any attempt to water them down.
14. Support - There's a difference between setting standards and micromanaging delivery. The state should set clear academic standards and hold schools accountable for meeting them. How a skilled educator gets students there should be their professional call. The push to legislate instructional methods is usually politically motivated, not educationally sound. I trust teachers. I've worked alongside them.
15. I approach this through a lens of systemic analysis, not just symbolism. The policies that produce inequitable outcomes in education, housing, and workforce development are usually not intentionally discriminatory. They're structural. My focus is on fixing the structures. Specifically: equitable school funding formulas that account for concentrated poverty and don't just track enrollment; diversifying the educator pipeline through targeted recruitment and loan forgiveness programs; and ensuring that discipline policies are applied consistently and equitably, with data

transparency so communities can see whether disparities exist and hold districts accountable for addressing them.

16. Support - Charter schools that operate outside local school board control, use public money to avoid accountability, or strip collective bargaining rights from their employees are not something I support. Public dollars, public accountability. Charters can be a useful innovation tool when they operate under the same rules as the rest of the system. When they don't, they're just privatization with better branding.

17. The pension system is one of the few genuine competitive advantages Maryland has in educator recruitment. I'd focus on three things: improving vesting timelines so educators don't have to wait a decade to have meaningful retirement security; ensuring the pension fund is managed with strict fiduciary standards and full transparency; and exploring portability improvements so educators moving within the state system don't lose accrued benefits. I know as currently constructed members of the system are unable to borrow/leverage against them like other industries can, and that should be rectified.

18. Oppose

19. Support

20.

- No Response
- Support
- Support
- Support

21. Support - We can't cut our way to a well-funded education system. Revenue has to be part of the conversation. That means looking honestly at whether our income tax structure reflects current economic reality, whether our sales tax base has kept up with a service-driven economy, and whether corporate tax policy is actually capturing what it should. I'll support that analysis and vote for solutions that are data-driven and equitable.

22. The current structure has not kept pace with how wealth is actually generated in Maryland's economy. I'd prioritize closing the carried interest and capital gains

treatment disparities that allow high earners to pay lower effective rates than working families, and I'd push for corporate minimum tax provisions to address the gap between statutory and effective rates for large corporations. The goal is a system where the effective rate reflects actual ability to pay, across all income types.

23. Local governments need more tools, not more mandates. I'd support legislation that gives counties more flexibility in revenue options, including local option taxes on items currently restricted to state control, with the requirement that new revenue capacity be tied to demonstrated public education investment. The current system creates too much dependency on the state formula and not enough local accountability. Give communities the tools to fund their own schools, and require them to use them. Maryland has shown they don't care about SMCPs we are often the last to get things that other counties get 1, 2 or 3 years in advance. We have to support ourselves to supplement what we don't receive from the state or federal level.