

Who are you?

Please introduce yourself and explain why you're running.

My name is William Reeder. Currently I am a Professor at George Mason University, the Heritage Chair of Cultural Criticism and a Virginia Eminent Scholar.

Education has been my life. I served 14 years as the founding Dean of the College of Visual and Performing Arts at George Mason, responsible for 8 academic divisions and was CEO of the Hylton Performing Arts Center and the Center for the Arts in Fairfax. I've been on the faculty at three universities and Director of special academic Institutes. I've dealt with large institutions, large budgets and long-term projects and programs. I've overseen the creation of an entire college and the construction of significant academic buildings. My wife is a music teacher and our daughter is an early childhood specialist in the Baltimore schools.

My experience is not just academic. I am the former Chairman of the Prince William County Economic Development Alliance, a member of the regional CEO Forum and a director on corporate boards. I was the founding Executive Director of the Sallie Mae Trust for Education, a national funder of educational projects and programs. I have many relationships with business, industry and community leaders. I want to put all that experience to work for Prince William County Schools.

I am not a politician. Serving on the School Board is not a stepping-stone in a political career – it is a capstone dedicated to service. What our schools need is for the community, parents, teachers, administrators, political leaders and other decision makers to come together for the good of our children and our community. I believe that I can help build this coalition and am willing to invest many years to the task.

Commitment to the job

Representing the citizens of this county on the school board will consume many hours of your time. You'll be expected to research complex issues with no staff support in a short period of time. You'll be expected to respond to citizens concerns and e-mails promptly, attend events at schools that your children don't attend, and sit through meetings that sometimes last until the wee hours of the morning.

What have you done to demonstrate that you understand the level of work necessary to perform this job? How many school board meetings have you attended in the last year? How many had you attended before you decided to run? Have you attended a budget or CIP work session?

I understand the time commitment required of Board members and I have time available to contribute.

As a member of the School Board:

I will commit to a practice of 24-hour response to all constituents in the Coles District who reach out to me with issues and concerns.

I will commit to holding one town hall meeting per year in each of the schools within the Coles District. And will represent what I learn to the Board, the District and the Board of County Supervisors.

I will constitute an advisory Board of parents, school administrators, staff, teachers, students and community leaders to assist in the identification and evaluation of issues that affect the schools and how best to resolve them. We will meet quarterly.

As a professional educator and school/university administrator for the past 30 years, I have experience in the formulation of on-line educational platforms, the development of charter schools, strategic funding platforms for education, and have built successful community schools in five cities. I have developed fundraising teams that have raised over \$300 million in philanthropy for education and the arts and have overseen the building of educational and cultural facilities in five cities, several of which (such as the Hylton Performing Arts Center) were partnerships between schools, regional governments and the community.

I have observed and participated in many school board meetings over the years, and have worked directly with schools districts on projects and programs in five cities. My budget work at Mason parallels the budget process of the Prince William Schools.

While in my role as Dean at George Mason University, I worked with the Prince William Schools on projects in the arts, Chinese language and cultural instruction (the Confucius Institute) and most recently oversaw the development of the Mason Game and Technology Academy - which was selected as Business Partner of the Year by SPARK. Recently, I served as guest vocal clinician with the Osbourn Park Madrigal ensemble. Many arts teachers in the Prince William schools received

their degrees from the College of Visual and Performing Arts at Mason during my tenure as Dean.

At Mason, I was a member of the President's Council and in that role was a senior member of the University's \$1 Billion budget management team. Earlier in my career, I was the founding Executive Director of the Sallie Mae Trust for Education, which became the primary funding agency for many educational projects across America. Successful budget management has been central in my career.

Top Priorities

If you could wave your magic wand and make one thing happen immediately, without regard for cost or politics, what would that be?

If I could wave a magic wand, I would fulfill all of the goals and objectives outlined in the 20/20 Strategic Plan.

Working with the Board of County Supervisors, other members of the School Board, the administration, teachers and the community, I would right size the budget to reduce class sizes, bring teacher pay in line with competing jurisdictions, and make a transformational investment in technology.

If PWCS received \$20 million that would be provided on an annual basis in perpetuity and was not restricted, what would you do with that money?

I would invest in the "people" side of the equation (salaries) and reduce class sizes. We simply must support our teachers or we will lose the best and the brightest, and we must allow our students the opportunity to receive the attention each deserves.

If you had to cut \$10 million from the budget, what would you cut?

Cuts are always difficult – but in my administrative career I have had to make them – sometimes painful – but when unavoidable, absolutely necessary.

As a process I would continue to invest in those things that are mandated by federal, state or local law/policy; I would try to "hold harmless" in those things that are clearly supported by parents and the community. Items that are left would be targets for elimination.

Budget investments and budget reductions are best approached through an inclusive process that involves all parties and hears from competing priorities and interests.

An informed decision is the best decision. An inclusive process is the best approach and tough budget decisions are part of the job.

Class Sizes

Do you believe classes in PWCS are too large, too small, or just about right?

As a rule we know that classes in the PWCS are too large. I am hearing from specific teachers about classes with well over 30 students. There is some disagreement among experts about just what constitutes the right size – but 30 and above certainly is not it.

If you believe class sizes are too large, do you believe they need to be reduced? If so, what is your plan for determining the appropriate size and bringing class sizes down, including paying for it?

Yes, class sizes need to be reduced. Exactly how large a class should be depends somewhat on the grade level and the subject. There is expert advice that should be drawn upon – including guidance from our teachers - for shaping a long-term plan

The gap between current class sizes and the optimum will take long-term budget planning and adjustment to address. It will require the support of the Board of County Supervisors and a mandate from the community.

I believe that the community will willingly invest in the strengthening of schools, provided there is confidence that the investment is needed, strategic and understood. Budget transparency is more than a buzzword, it is fundamental and essential, and requires understanding across the spectrum.

Addressing this challenge successfully is central to the responsibilities of the Board.

Planning / CIP

Looking forward, do you believe PWCS is adequately planning for student growth?

The planning I have seen is substantive and meaningful – but schools cannot address all of the issues and goals in the plan alone. School growth is driven by County growth. As such we need to mobilize the community and the Board of County Supervisors to embrace long-term demographic trends and developments.

If not, where do you think those plans are inadequate and what changes would you propose to address those deficiencies?

I think the integration of the plans with other players – particularly the strategic plan of the County – needs further alignment. And, I think we need more organized input from the community (particularly parents) and from teachers going forward.

I believe it is the Board's responsibility, working with the Superintendent, to line up the stakeholders for long-term strategic impact and problem solving.

My commitment is to work with others to develop that alignment.

Transparency

Lack of transparency in the process used to propose and amend school construction projects has resulted in the community losing trust in the school division. Ferlazzo Elementary and the pool in the 12th high school are examples of that lack of transparency.

Do you believe the process used to inform and solicit input from community about school development in their area is adequate? If you believe it is inadequate, what would you change?

I do think we need to strengthen communication between the school division and members of the community – both internally and externally across the County. There is concern about transparency and about actions of the administration, the School Board and the County Board of Supervisors. I don't think it is useful to ignore this concern. It needs to be thoughtfully engaged and communications improved.

Speaking from the Coles District – as stated earlier, I will immediately convene a Coles Advisory Council, which will include teachers, administrators, students, parents and other community leaders. This is separate from the PTSO and Advisory Councils to the schools – this is an Advisory Council for me in my role as a member of the School Board.

I will also hold at least one town hall meeting in each school in my district over the course of the year. Hopefully this will allow citizens and others concerned to be part of the decision making process and overcome transparency concerns.

Special Education

Do you believe special education is adequately funded and supported in PWCS? If not, what areas do you believe are underfunded or inadequately supported and where would you look to find sufficient resources for it?

There is no doubt that special education is underfunded. We will need to work with our federal legislators to get the federal funding to match federal mandates. We also need to align in every possible way with community agencies that serve special needs children and their families to increase the resources we collectively can provide.

New Directions

Students attending New Directions currently do not have transportation to or from school. They have to ride public transit, take cabs, or have their parents drop the off and pick them up. Do you believe PWCS should provide transportation for students attending New Directions? If so, would you vote to direct staff to ensure that transporting these students is a priority for the 2016 – 2017 school year?

Yes. And, it is my understanding that the School District will provide busing services to New Directions students when the new school is built.

Compensation

Do you believe our faculty and staff are adequately compensated? If you believe compensation is inadequate, how would you propose increasing it, and how would you pay for it?

No.

It is public knowledge that we underpay teachers and staff compared to surrounding jurisdictions. I know for a fact that some of the very best teachers have moved to neighboring counties where pay is better and working conditions are less pressured. We lose far too many of the best teachers who drop out because the compensation isn't commensurate with the time pressures and the level of educational investment required to teach - or there is simply a more supportive jurisdiction available.

What to do? Work with the community to create a mandate and with the Board of County Supervisors to address the problem over time. Successfully addressing the issues of transparency and budget confidence is fundamental to solving this problem.

Classroom Autonomy

In recent years there has been a movement, both in PWCS and across the nation, for lesson pacing to be defined by central administration and mandated through common assessments that must be given within a set date range. This has left

teachers with little ability to adapt lesson pacing to suit their personal instructional style and their students' needs.

What are your thoughts on this movement? Do you believe it will improve student learning or do you believe it should be scaled back?

Both.

One of the hottest subjects in education these days is standardized tests – do they work, are they testing what matters, and have they corrupted the entire system? Students are tested at every grade level. School funding and school budgets at the national, state and local level are very much influenced by test scores. High school students are expected to take the SAT or ACT. As a result, “teaching to the test” has taken over education in America.

There is growing agreement among educators, families and policy makers that the current state of testing is now creating more problems than it is solving, and that children, families and school systems everywhere are stuck! We often speak of educational reform, but it has become obvious that we most definitely need testing reform.

Through his research, Harvard professor, Dr. Howard Gardner, has identified eight different kinds of intelligence, which include linguistic (good with words), logic-math (good with numbers and logic), spatial (good with pictures and multi dimensional visuals), body/kinesthetic (good with physical activity), musical (music), interpersonal (great with people), intrapersonal (great at introspection) and naturalist intelligence (good with nature).

In our testing programs we are primarily testing the first two of these intelligences – linguistic and math/logic. And, when we “teach to the test” we reinforce them at the exclusion of the others types of intelligence.

Not only would pictures, music, relationships, introspection, nature studies and physical development help students succeed with language and math, they turn out to be every bit as important to life itself.

Children are not alike. Yet, when we teach to the test, we are actually forcing conformity. Children are different!

BUT!

Whether students are college bound, or seek to move into the workplace right out of high school, they must be “work ready” to succeed. Skills needed in modern society require formal training, which requires validation. If we don’t validate that learning is occurring, we risk short-changing students seriously.

We are also a transitory society, even between schools within the district. Kids that transfer from one school to the next need to be at the same level and pace in what they are learning.

There needs to be careful central oversight to make sure that students are not “falling behind” or suddenly find themselves in a setting for which they have not been prepared. And, students must learn at a level needed to find jobs and succeed.

So what to do?

Common formative assessments are intended to guide instruction. If teachers are given a say in the pacing of the tests and in the formulation of lesson plans and their assessments, then we might begin to get the best of both worlds. In other words, if stakeholders are included, we will still benefit from knowing that learning is occurring – and when and where to address problems. Assessments need to be continuous – not reserved for the quarterly summative unit tests.

A case in point is one of our own schools, Westgate Elementary, a school that serves primarily families below the poverty income level. The Principal at Westgate established collaborative learning teams, where teachers co-planned and developed common formative assessments, which informed instruction and levels of mastery. As a result this school has been a school of excellence, with high levels of student achievement.

Standardized tests have a place as a diagnostic – but NOT as the entire focus of teaching. It should support learning instead of obstruct it. Human life is “creative” - that’s why we are diverse – we don’t do well by being forced into a standardized system in which we have no input. If teachers can be given a say in how and when testing is done, we will be more successful.

It is vital that we engage this subject as a community, and not assume that the “experts” at the federal level will get it right without our input.

Zero Based Budgeting

Do you agree or disagree with the school board's vote on zero-based budgeting? Do you believe any savings will be discovered as a result? Which departments / schools do you believe should be examined next, and why?

Zero Based Budgeting is a specific budgeting technique that has its value. Alas, in the institutions I have worked it sounded better than it turned out to be.

The intention of Zero Based Budgeting is that it hopefully allocates resources based on needs and benefits, drives management to find cost effective ways to improve operations, detects inflated budgets, identifies and eliminates wasteful and obsolete operations, and forces cost centers to identify their mission and their relationship to overall goals.

In reality it is very time consuming, is difficult to manage and for a very large organization produces more information than Board members can honestly process.

I do believe that a careful annual review of spending and academic priorities is a mandate of the Board. A "staged" Zero-based budgeting approach might well be a useful tool for those deliberations, but for an entire system, in my experience, it's often not the best approach.

The Budget

Do you believe the process used to review and adopt a budget should be changed? If so, what do you think can be done better and how would you change it?

Routine monthly budget reviews and on-going discussions throughout the year are essential.

Without continuous communication, presenting a completed budget on a specific day late in the calendar year and asking for approval does not give Board members enough time to deliberate options and to make adjustments.

The Board needs a way of participating in budget formulation and have the time to ask questions and recommend adjustments.

Do you believe that the School Board should accept the school division's proposed budget without adjustment, because the division and their staff know what's best and it's not the school board's job to nickel and dime things?

I don't think it's helpful to "nickel and dime" but it's also inappropriate to rubber stamp.

I think the staff of the PWC schools is highly competent –and I trust that their recommendations are the result of many balances and solid experience.

However, the Board still has the ultimate fiduciary role, and as such can and should ask for adjustments - hopefully with minimal disruption - but with validation that the priorities of the community and the approved strategic plan are intact.

Do you believe there are areas where savings can be found in the budget, and, if so, what are those areas?

Inside any \$ Billion system there are always savings to be found. Projects and programs evolve and from time to time need to be ended. It's often difficult for insiders to do that because jobs are sometimes on the line and people on the front lines are not comfortable with those "tough decisions."

The Board has no choice but to work with the administration to find those savings and insist on them (some of the tools of zero based budget can be helpful here).

All budgets need to align with educational purpose. In my years of educational administrative experience, keeping central administrative costs under control is where savings are often to be found.

If we are going to ask the community for addition funding for the Schools, we will need to verify that current funds are fully optimized. So - once again - the exercise is inescapable.

Do you believe there are areas in the school division that are underfunded, and, if so, what are those areas and should funding them be a high priority for the school board?

Yes.

Teacher pay, class size reduction, early childhood, special education, facilities updates and improvements in older schools and technology platforms - to name a few.

Technology is rapidly changing the way we teach and the way we learn. We need a transformational investment in technology, which will prove to make many other investments less expensive and education more impactful.

I think teacher compensation and working conditions (class sizes and onerous paperwork) is the most pressing need and warrants priority attention.

What are your thoughts on the citizen budget advisory committees?

Absolutely essential! How else will people be willing to invest? Without structured, formal citizen involvement there is no hope of receiving more funding for education.

Prince William County enjoys one of the largest concentrations of highly educated people in the world. We are a wealthy county. Only good will come from engaging our citizens.

A process that respects people's time, captures and synthesizes input and integrates public thought into the School's budget is part of the job of the Board and administration.

Strategic Plan

Do you believe the goals and objectives stated in the PWCS Strategic Plan should be the goals and objectives of the school division? If not, assuming you could change it, what changes would you make to it?

Yes, the 20/20 Vision in PWCS – preparing graduates to compete in the 21st century global community is well crafted, has specific measurable goals and metrics, was the result of many months of input and deliberation and has been accepted by the current Board.

In my view, the plan should form the baseline for community discussions and for alignment with the strategic plan of Prince William County. I would not make changes to the plan in isolation; rather I would work to build community support and action to accomplish its objectives.

The Superintendent

What do you believe should be the Superintendent's goals and objectives for the 2016 – 2017 school year?

The Superintendent's goals and objectives should be aligned with the strategic plan and the budget priorities passed by the School Board, with specific metrics. It is my understanding that the Board votes on the Superintendent's goals for the year, and that if any issues arise that are important to the Board, then those can be added to his objectives. I support this approach.