



**2018**  
**Frederick County Council**  
**Candidate Questionnaire**

Candidate:	Jessica Fitzwater
Office (District or At-Large)	District 4
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Campaign Treasurer:	Chelsea Kadish

*I confirm that the responses provided here are my official positions in seeking local office, and I understand that FCTA reserves the right to share my responses with members and interested parties.*

<b>Candidate Signature</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	

- *Candidates: In order to be considered for a recommendation, you must respond to each of the questions. Clarifications, explanations, and other information may be attached, but please be certain to indicate clearly the questions(s) to which you refer. Please return your completed and signed questionnaire to **the Frederick County Teachers Association no later than Tuesday, March 6, 2018 by 5:00 p.m***

1. What is your vision for the future of Frederick County Public Schools? As a member of the County Council how would you support this vision?

*My vision for Frederick County Public Schools is a great public school for every child. That means every school should have the facilities, resources, and excellent staff required to provide quality instructional programs and to meet the needs of our diverse and growing student population, regardless of geographic location within the county.*

*We know that the number one factor in a child's school success is a positive relationship with his/her teachers. We must attract the best and brightest educators to Frederick County and keep them here in order to strengthen our schools and provide for our children.*

*As your County Council Member from District 4, my primary way to support this vision has been and will continue to be to advocate and vote for a BoE budget that meets the current and growing needs of our school system. The County Executive and a majority of the Council have funded the BoE well above Maintenance of Effort every year of this current term. I have also supported capital projects and a CIP that keeps school construction projects on pace.*

*Excellent public schools drive economic development, job growth, and the quality of life in our community. An educated citizenry is essential to our County's future. I will continue to spread a positive message about public education that treats education funding as an investment in our future, not a burden on taxpayers.*

2. What do you consider to be adequate funding for Frederick County Public Schools? Explain.

*The Board of Education has consistently sent proposed budgets to the County that outline the needs, not wants, of our school system. I believe it is our duty as County officials to diligently review the budget request and then fund the BoE's budget as close to its recommended amount as possible while balancing the needs of public safety and critical county services. Maintenance of Effort funding is absolutely not enough funding for Frederick County Public Schools. It was always intended to be the floor, not the ceiling, for funding levels, and this was abused by the last administration. We are the seventh wealthiest county in Maryland, yet we rank 21<sup>st</sup> in the state in per pupil funding. Throwing money at one's problems is not always the solution, but it is in our best interest as a County to invest in our students. Our FY18 budget included \$3.8 million of additional MoE funding and \$10 million above MoE towards FCPS. Total funding for FCPS represented 47% of the entire County budget.*

*We still have a long way to go to make up for years of flat funding, but we are on a better path forward. Our children are our most treasured resource; they are the future of this county and deserve the best possible educational experience. That does not mean living outside of our means- but it does mean making sure our public schools don't just survive, but **thrive**.*

3. Frederick County Teachers Association (FCTA), Frederick Association of School Support Employees (FASSE) & Frederick County Administrative & Supervisory Association (FCASA)

support a revenue structure that will provide a predictable, reliable and stable source of sustained funding for education. What are your ideas for that revenue stream? What is your position on the constant yield vs constant rate for property taxes?

*Property tax and income tax are the primary source of revenue for the County's General Fund. These revenue sources are fairly predictable and reliable, although they are of course affected by economic factors. The FCPS operating budget is funded through the General Fund. Some state and local governments have found success in increasing property taxes if the increase is earmarked for a specific need, such as public education. This is certainly something I am willing to consider, however it will depend on political and public will.*

*The property tax rate in Frederick County has remained the same during my term on the Council, and I supported the maintained tax rate each budget cycle. I am proud of what we have accomplished while keeping tax rates flat. I have not supported the constant yield tax rate because increased property values are a sign of an improving economy and our local government must keep up with the demands of that economy.*

*The idea of replacing the impact fee with a transfer tax seems to have resurfaced, though no formal proposal has come forward. While the impact fee has to go towards school construction, the transfer tax funds can be spent with more flexibility which means less money set aside specifically for schools. This is a fiscally irresponsible way to move forward that does damage to our students and schools and digs further into the pockets of taxpayers. I am against eliminating the developer impact fee.*

4. Recruiting and retaining high-quality, diverse employees is essential to improved student achievement. It is made more difficult in Frederick County by our proximity to higher paying school systems and the high cost of owning a home in Frederick. What would you do to help the school system recruit new staff and keep experienced staff in Frederick County?

*I have and will continue to vote for a County budget that includes adequate funding for staff salaries. The BoE has continually stated that this is their top priority, and we have done our best to fund this need. Education is a people business and without quality professionals teaching our kids, fixing our buildings, driving our buses, and leading our profession, we've got classrooms with shiny smartboards and textbooks and that's about it. We need to ensure that starting salaries and pay for veteran teachers, support staff, and administrators are competitive with other Maryland counties to ensure that we recruit and retain the quality teachers our kids deserve. Secondly, I believe that all county employees deserve to be treated with equal respect. That means if a salary step increase and/or COLA raise is being budgeted for county employees, it should also be budgeted for school employees and vice versa.*

*The recent ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) report from the United Way shone a spotlight on affordable housing as one of the biggest barriers for working families in our County. I have worked diligently on issues of affordable housing during my term on the Council and look forward to continuing that work. As the liaison to the Affordable Housing Council, I meet monthly with housing officials, non-profit leaders, and developers about how we can incentivize the building of more workforce*

*housing and continue to diversify the types of housing in Frederick County. Two of my bills regarding affordable housing have passed the Council and I am currently working on other initiatives. I see this as one of the biggest issues facing Frederick County and it is directly related to our ability to attract and retain education professionals.*

5. What is your plan to provide adequate space for all Frederick's school children? What would you do to alleviate the overcrowding that exists currently in many of our schools? What role does the county's Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance play in mitigating/ preventing overcrowding of schools?

*The County Executive and a majority of the Council have worked hard to keep critical school construction projects on track, including Frederick High School, Butterfly Ridge Elementary, and Sugarloaf Elementary. I will continue to advocate and support CIP and capital budgets that keep essential school construction (new projects, additions, and remodels) on track. Some overcrowding issues may be alleviated by redistricting, however these decisions are made by the BoE.*

*The county's APFO was updated by the former BoCC in 2011 which changed in the way school construction is funded. Developers could opt for a School Construction Fee rather than paying the cost of the actual construction/renovation based on future enrollment predictions as was previously required. This represents a significant loss in funds available for school growth that is often necessary when new developments are approved and built. During this term, the County Executive and a majority of the Council worked together to pass Bill 16-09 which eliminates the option of paying School Construction Fees for future developments. Unfortunately, that does not affect the many developments that are in DRRA contracts with the County. I am in favor of revisiting our School Construction Fee amounts, however a majority of the Council voted to remove this bill from our agenda. I am committed to continue to work on this issue, both for the remainder of this term and in the future.*

6. Inequities in technology, space and functionality exist between new and newly renovated buildings versus older buildings. How do you see the need to renovate older schools fitting into the Capital Improvement Plan? How should the renovation needs of older buildings be funded?

*The first priority in this area should be to make sure that all of our schools offer the same, high-quality facilities. Technology disparities are mentioned often, but there are many other inequities among the schools such as auditoriums, music classrooms, science labs, sports fields, HVAC systems, and much more. I will support County budgets that incorporate priorities from the FCPS Education Facilities Master Plan. These improvement items should be worked into our Capital Improvement Program gradually, in priority order, and in a sustainable manner.*

*One challenge to these improvements is that state funding does not cover renovations or replacement of equipment in existing schools. State funding contributes to new school construction and materials (i.e. desks, smartboards, computers, etc.) which only increases the disparity among our schools. The BoE and county government must work together to make renovations of older school buildings a priority in the Capital Improvement Program, even though the burden lies solely on local funding. A portion of revenue from our recordation tax goes towards school construction, although much of this is often spent on debt*

*service for construction projects. This could be a place to look for funding for renovation projects.*

7. FCTA, FASSE & FCASA opposes any public funding of private schools, including but not limited to, vouchers to cover private school tuition and tax credit schemes. What is your position on vouchers and other forms of public funding for private or home schooling?

*I am opposed to any public funding of private schools and home schooling. Our public schools welcome not select groups, but any and every child who lives in Frederick County. Voucher programs that support private schools inherently reduce the amount of funding for public schools, so I would oppose the introduction of any voucher-type program in Frederick County. Families who make private school or home-school choices should understand that Frederick County's priority must be to support a strong public school system at all levels.*

8. FCTA, FASSE & FCASA oppose the outsourcing and privatization of jobs currently done by the dedicated education support professionals of FCPS. Do you think it is appropriate for the school system to privatize aspects of their operations? Under what circumstances, if any, would you support privatizing or outsourcing work currently done by FCPS staff?

*Privatization of county and school employees is often brought up as a potential cost-saving measure. For businesses that are only about the bottom-line, this could perhaps be an effective change. But for a school system whose business is about people- the people that serve our youngest and most precious citizens- it is not only a financially irresponsible option, but will have a staggering negative impact on the quality of the work these employees do every day. I have supported the County Executive in her efforts to undo the privatization of certain county functions that had a negative impact on service and were not cost-effective.*

*I believe that our BoE and FCPS staff have looked at privatization of multiple school functions in the past as a cost-comparison measure, but the studies always seem to show that our own staff are just as affordable if not more affordable from a financial standpoint.*

*Even without the financial argument, we know that when employees are truly invested in their communities and their work, their productivity and effectiveness increases. We have amazing support staff who build relationships with our students and families and ensure that each student gets to school safely, has a warm meal, gives individualized attention when needed, and can learn in a clean, safe environment. I don't think there is any circumstance where we would want to give that up.*

9. As a member of the County Council, how will you work with FCTA, FASSE and FCASA so that the experience, knowledge and expertise of professional educators will help inform your decisions on issues related to public education?

*As an educator myself, I know how important it is to include the experience and knowledge of those currently working in the schools when making decisions that affect public education. FCTA, FASSE, and FCASA represent the vast majority of our school employees and are truly the experts on education issues.*

*When employees have buy-in to the decision-making process, changes and transitions almost always happen more smoothly. I will be open to meeting with FCTA, FASSE, and FCASA leadership and members whenever I am voting on education funding and/or other issues that affect our students, schools, and staff.*

### **Candidate Biography:**

Jessica is making history as a member of the first ever Frederick County Council, one of only two women under 40 serving in county elected leadership in the state of Maryland. During her tenure on the Council, she has championed the successful effort to repeal Frederick County's English-only Ordinance, introduced legislation to improve affordable workforce housing, initiated the Frederick County Human Trafficking Task Force, and supported county budgets that invest in public education, public safety, and community partnerships. As a graduate of Emerge Maryland, a prestigious political training program for Democratic women, she is engaged with the best and brightest of Maryland's political leaders.

Jessica takes an active role in the community in other ways, including playing violin with the Frederick Symphony Orchestra and serving on the Board of Directors of the Frederick Arts Council. She is a past member of the Board of Directors of the Frederick County Teachers Association and has served as an elected delegate to the MD State Education Association (MSEA) and National Education Association (NEA) Representative Assemblies.

Jessica was named one of The Frederick News-Post's 13 Young Professionals Under 30 in 2012 and earned the prestigious NEA Political Activist of the Year title in 2014. In 2015 she was honored as one of the Maryland Daily Record's Leading Women.

Jessica lives and works in Frederick County as a general music teacher at Oakdale Elementary and holds a B.A. in music from St. Mary's College of MD and an M.S. in Educational Leadership from Hood College. She lives in Fredericktowne Village with her husband Gerald and son Jonah.