

Board of Education Questions—Lucas Dorion

Personal Questions:

1. How does the mission of Hoover City Schools align with your professional and personal mission?

My entire professional life has been focused on the care and teaching of children and teenagers. In seminary and as an undergrad, I took every elective that was focused on preparing ministers for the specialized work of teaching children and youth. I have also been a life long supporter of public education and have been volunteering in public schools since I was 22 years old. I think the choices that have shaped my life and my demonstrated commitment to the service of our schools speaks best to my personal and professional alignment with the mission Hoover City Schools.

Throughout my 12 and half years of living in Hoover, I have looked for every possible avenue of service to our school system. Before I had children of my own, I was serving a congregation as a minister to children and youth and was intrigued when Ann Hartline and Dennis Tanner, invited me to participate in the Hoover Coalition for Safe and Drug Free Schools. This work was driven by research that said students internalized messages like “don’t do drugs” better, if they heard them repeated in all the key areas of influence in their life. In other words, if “don’t do drugs” was a message students not only heard at school, but also at home and in the media and then again in their places of worship, the data showed the chances of drug use would actually go down. Armed with this research and under the leadership of Dr. Farr, the coalition was formed and faith leaders were invited to join educators in this important work.

When my own children entered the Hoover system, my first volunteer gig was shelving books in the school library while Jennifer Rich taught her classes. I watched and listened as she taught and was honestly inspired by the intentionality, passion and care she provided her students each week. I kept coming back to shelve books and began wondering if there were other ways that I could be of help to the school. Having had such a positive first experience, it was an easy “yes” when other opportunities were presented. I could tell countless stories of things I’ve observed in the halls and classrooms of RES, but to a person, the faculty and staff of that school through their example and unwavering philosophy and practice of putting the needs of the students before all else, convinced me that my time was being spent in support of a worthy cause.

2. What would you hope that your legacy would be when your time on the Board is completed? What is that one big accomplishment for which your name would be associated with?

“There is no limit to what we can accomplish if we don’t care who gets the credit.” I have heard this quote or (something similar to it) attributed to a number of different people but the first time I ever heard it was in a speech given by Mayor Ed Daniel of Marion, AL. Mayor Daniel was speaking that day to a group of volunteers who had come to do home repairs in partnership with Sowing Seeds of Hope. SSOH is Rural Development Program founded in Perry County under the leadership of Mayor Daniel. From the

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beginning, it was the mission of SSOH to focus on the improvement of several key areas: education, health care, housing and economic development. After nearly a quarter century of operation, SSOH has built almost 20 new and affordable homes for residents who previously had inadequate housing. They were instrumental in the construction of a local dialysis clinic, which kept residents from having to travel great distances for life-saving treatment. During the Obama administration, they received national recognition for their work in helping to lower stroke rates in the county by providing education programs and free blood pressure clinics. This is in no way an exhaustive list of the impact SSOH has had and is having on their community, but it is NO exaggeration to say people are living longer, better lives in Perry County because SSOH exists and they exist because of the vision and humble leadership of Mayor Ed Daniel. He was a leader who did not want worry about legacy building or future political ambition to stand in the way of what he and others dreamed could be accomplished.

I believe there is no limit to what we can accomplish in Hoover City Schools, if we do not waste time and energy worrying about who might get the credit. If I am appointed to the Hoover Board of Education, I would want service to students and teachers to be my legacy. If I am remembered at all, I would hope it will be less about knowing my name and more about how I cared for those around me.

3. How would you respond if a parent makes contact with you about a specific situation at a school?

The BOE is first and foremost, a policy making body and while they do hire and supervise the superintendent, they have no role in the day to day operations with any specific school or even with the central office. With that said, as I have served on the various PTO boards and even at the district level as an officer on the Hoover Parent Teacher Council, I have always felt that one of my greatest opportunities is as a resource for my fellow parents. Because of my work in and around the school system, my proximity has often given me access to information and an understanding of processes and “chains of command,” that not every member of HCS family might have. I have always felt it was my responsibility to share that knowledge with other members of the community and assist them with navigation of the system where I could.

As a member of the BOE, I would hope to serve as a similar resource to my community. I would, of course, want to listen to any concerns that were brought to my attention and then work with the parent to help guide them to the HCS professional employee that can best address their concerns or provide them the information they need.

4. What is your stance on requiring a vaccination for all students?

The question of vaccinations feels more like a public health issue rather than a matter for the BOE. With that said, if I am appointed to the BOE, I would want to study and understand how any current policies may have been developed and seek input from experts in the field of public health, like the Alabama Department of Health and Centers for Disease Control before offering any opinion.

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Communication Questions:

5. How should the Board communicate with parents and the community? How should the Superintendent and the Board interact and communicate?

As a citizen of Hoover, I have always appreciated that members of our VOLUNTEER BOE who take as much time out of their schedules as they do to be part of school events and participate in community meetings. I believe this creates organic opportunities for members of the community to have a direct access to these school leaders. In addition to these more impromptu encounters, I have experienced the members of our BOE to be very open to communication via email or phone conversation. Following this example, if I am appointed to the BOE, I would commit to participation in community events, as well as establishing consistent avenues and patterns of communication with our community.

With regards to how the members of the BOE and the Superintendent should communicate, I would expect for the means of communication to fit the need of the situation and to always abide by legal requirements set out by the Alabama Open Meetings Act. Additionally, I believe that all communication between the members of the BOE and Superintendent should be open, honest, respectful in tone and focused on service to our students and HCS employees.

6. What are potential ways you could foresee yourself interacting with individual schools directly to make yourself familiar with their specific needs without impacting operations?

As I have already mentioned, I have always been impressed with the many ways our BOE takes time to interact with students, HCS employees and citizens of Hoover at large. They make it a priority to show up for special events at our schools and throughout our community. I have personally spotted BOE members at everything from an event to honor a new certification earned by a school, to a surprise party that recognized a national award won by one of our principals, to sporting events and concerts featuring the talents of our amazing students...and I've even seen our BOE members working the lunch line during lunch room appreciation events! As I have said before, if I am appointed to the BOE, I would be excited to follow in this good example.

My various volunteer positions have allowed me to be in a good number of schools and meet teachers and administrators from all over the system. As a member of the BOE, I would hope for and eagerly seek out invitations to walk the halls and meet the administrators, teachers and staff in every one of our 17 schools. Every time I have met a new principal or found myself talking to new HSC teacher or gotten to step into one of our schools, I have walked away inspired and energized by the experience and I'm hopeful about the possibility of future interactions.

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Policy and Program Questions:

7. Moving forward post-pandemic, should each student have the option for traditional, hybrid, or virtual learning?

The pandemic has taught us many lessons and one of those I believe, is that face to face learning is the best and ideal option for most student instruction. With that said, there are absolutely situations where some version of virtual learning would be a better choice for some students and their families. At this time, I feel like it would be premature for me to make a firm stance on exactly what that virtual options should look like. I do believe HCS should prioritize the study of this issue. As a member of the BOE, I would want to hear from the experts we have in our system, and our larger community, especially those who work in technology, curriculum and instructional support. As with all things, there would also be concerns related to finances that must be considered. Additionally, we would want to listen careful to members of our HCS family so that any virtual offering takes into account the strengths and serious realities faced by students, parents and teachers during this past school year's virtual learning experience.

8. What are two things you think HCS is doing well and two things that you would like to work to improve. How do you propose to change those?

This may be the most difficult question I have faced so far. As I consider all of the great programs across HCS and the exceptional level at which they are provided, it feels impossible to single out just two things. At the same time, while I could rattle off a list of HCS programs that I believe to be providing an excellent level of service to our students and their families...there is not a single thing on that list I would not also hope to see improved. No matter how high achieving HCS may be in one area or another, there is always room for growth and improvement. I believe that working together it is possible for us to continually improve the quality of a HCS education through the hard work of constant evaluation and openness to innovation.

Two examples of this I might offer are the HCS facilities and our HSC employees. We have outstanding facilities here in HCS and they are certainly near the top of any list of assets to our system. At the same time, our facilities present one of our greatest challenges. In addition to the cost of maintaining and updating our current schools, we also know that many of our schools are nearing capacity. Strategic planning, careful listening to community stakeholders and creative leadership will be required to keep HCS facilities on the superior level at which we have come to expect. On a similar note, we know that HSC has the best people teaching, staffing and administering our schools. I cannot stress the level of passion for education and professional expertise I have encountered on every level of our system. We have a phenomenal team of educators in HCS! While our people are truly worthy of celebration, we also recognize that HSC faces a challenge in the area of diversity in hiring. This is evident when we look at the demographic breakdowns of our staff and faculty as compared to our student body. We have work to do in this area, certainly because of our obligations in our pursuit of unitary status, but more importantly to our students. In a 2018 study published by the National

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Bureau of Economic Research, researchers from Johns Hopkins and American University found that having just one black elementary school teacher by third grade made black students 13% more likely to attend college and 32% more likely if they had two black teachers. The researchers concluded that the role modeling effect was a powerful key motivator. There are others, but this is one way that I see how our remarkable team of HCS employees can be improved for the good our system and for the lifting up of our students.

9. Do you believe that HCS does its best to give a quality education for all students? Explain your answer.

Yes, I believe HCS is intentionally working to provide the same quality education to every student. I believe this because through my service on things like the HCS Parent Equity Committee and my grant work with the HCS Foundation, I have seen and heard this work unfold at the school and district level. If you spend any time around any of our HCS personnel, you will hear an unending conversational thread of continuous improvement that is being weaved through every layer of our system. This conversation is being driven by the engine of research and constant analysis of data.

10. As the City grows, it has an increase in fire, police, and other services provided by the City, and the schools increase in the number of students and services provided. What are the roles of the City of Hoover and the HCS in new development?

HCS is responsible for providing the same quality education to every child who lives in the City of Hoover. As our city continues to grow, we need informed and forward thinking leaders on the BOE, who passionately believe and understand that the sole mission and role of HCS is to provide the outstanding level of educational experience to every child no matter how long they have been here or where they live in our city. We are fortunate that the leadership at the Hoover City Council has been intentional about seeking input from HCS leadership as they make plans for future development and growth in both our city and our city school system.

11. The City Council at the request of the Board of Education voted to ask the legislation, which the legislature granted, a request for an election for an increase in property tax by 3.6 mils. What is your understanding for asking for this increase and how would it benefit the schools?

Providing the quality of education that we have come to associate with HCS is an expensive commitment. Over 50% of HCS budget is supported through local funds, the majority of which are provided through local taxes. This local tax revenue is crucial for the school system and it directly translates into educational excellence for HCS family. With those local funds, our school system is able to provide extra teaching units in every school, which has the effect of lowering the teacher to student ratio. More teaching units in the school also means, more personalized focus for every student's individual needs. Local funds are also used for additional school counselors, who are crucial to the emotional support of students and their families during normal times and who have

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been lifelines during this time of global pandemic. In total, money from local tax dollars will help to supply HCS with over 210 additional teaching units in fiscal year 2021, which works out to nearly 20% of our entire school workforce. The proposed property tax increase of 3.6 mills would generate something like 5.9 million additional dollars in funding, which is a great start in helping our system remain fiscally secure while it addresses its challenges and prepares for the future. Concerns like future residential growth, needs for increases in our special education funding, continued increases in Maintenance of Care and the ever present desire to maintain the high quality of education that HCS is known for makes an increase in the mills rate a solid first step to the continued success of our school system.

Recently, I read a public survey produced in 2019 by the Public Affairs Council of Alabama on behalf of the Alabama Association of School Boards. The survey reveals that 74% of Alabama residents believe that the state spends too little on education and that 69% of those surveyed would be in favor of increasing taxes to support education. The problem is that no single option, such as, millage rate increases, new sales taxes or raising income taxes, capture a majority of support. This makes generating new sources of funding for public education, incredibly complicated for elected officials, like the Hoover City Council. As a citizen of Hoover, I am thankful for the city leadership that had the courage and wisdom to follow the recommendation of their BOE and vote in favor of the millage rate increase. Following their lead, when the vote is scheduled, I am committed to supporting the effort in anyway that I can to help ensure its passage.

12. Explain to the best of your understanding what RC3 offers and how do we expand the offering? Would it benefit the students and the community to expand the hours? If so, how should the hours be expanded?

The Riverchase Career Connection Center is an example of innovation in education that has made HCS a trendsetter in our state. As with all things in HCS it was a strategic response based on the careful analysis of data trends we were seeing among our HCS graduates. In the years leading up to the inception of RC3, we seeing survey data telling us that an increasing number of graduates from Hoover and Spain Park High Schools had no plans to attend college. At the same time, while our graduation and college and career readiness rates remain among the highest in the state, we began seeing indications that a growing number of our graduates were getting into and starting college, but were opting not to come back for the second semester. The formation of RC3 was HCS's creative and highly relevant solution to a need our city and our state was facing.

In the larger context of our state, RC3, can be viewed as one of the ways Hoover is helping to meet the challenge issued by our Governor to add 500,000 skilled workforce jobs to the Alabama labor force by the year 2025. After making their way successfully through programs at RC3, we have HCS graduates who are not only better prepared for college but who are also capable of entering directly into the Alabama job market as highly skilled potential employees, oftentimes having already completed necessary certifications. In the weeks ahead, RC3 will hold its first "signing day" to celebrate our

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graduates who upon completion of their program already have invitations to continue their training at the next level and some who have already secured job offers in their chosen field.

I have had a couple of opportunities to tour RC3 and to see first hand the work they are doing there. It is a state of the art facility and truly a jewel in the crown of our system. Through partnership with local businesses, students are able to learn skills that will make them ready for career or college. Currently RC3 houses academies for culinary and hospitality, health sciences, fire science, skilled trades and cyber innovation. Students from both Spain Park and Hoover participate in their chosen academy and still take classes back on their main campuses. As a member of the Hoover Parent Teacher Council, I got to hear frequent updates as RC3 was coming online and as a member of that year's HCS Textbook Committee, got to participate in reviewing and approving their curriculum. One of the things I was most impressed with is the level of detail that was put into designing the school. The goal of RC3 is to train our students for jobs in actual work places and so everything was designed to accomplish that student focused mission. Just like a real job, when students want to enter a particular academy, they must apply and be interviewed by academy faculty. When students arrive in the building, rather than taking attendance they use special cards to "clock in" as they begin work and then "clock out" as they head home or back to their main campus. The culinary program has a first rate kitchen that has already been used by student chefs to prepare food for special events. In fact, our BOE hosted receptions for Superintendent candidates and they will provide the desserts at this year's HCS Foundation "Denim and Dining" where their food will be both educational showcase and delicious treat for the Foundation's guests.

As RC3 continues to grow into its full potential, I hope that the possibility of expanded use by the community stays on the table for consideration. Before the facility even opened, one of the great ideas that was expressed by project leaders, was that in the future RC3 could be made available to adult educational opportunities and training in the evenings. The thought was, that participants in these programs would be charged tuition, which would generate revenue that could both cover operations and generate some additional funding for the school and school system. There is also plenty of space left in the RC3 facility and many local businesses remain eager to partner with HCS in this endeavor.

13. Should the HCS find themselves in the middle of a pandemic in the future, what should be the goal of the HCS as it relates to teaching and learning?

Regardless of the global health situation, HCS's goal should remain consistent with its stated mission to provide a safe and caring atmosphere for teaching and learning no matter the circumstances. HCS must remain single minded in keeping the focus on the needs of the students we serve and what best accomplishes the goal of providing the same high quality of education to every student in our care.

There is a great deal of transition taking place in our system at the moment, but I am already aware that conversations evaluating the systems pandemic performance and

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gathering information from stakeholders has begun. I have every confidence that the educational experts at every level of leadership in HCS will use lessons learned from our recent experiences to improve and prepare for any future similar situation. As a member of the BOE, I would welcome and support these evaluative conversations and processes in any way that was appropriate.

14. What is your understanding of the desegregation case of Stout v. Jefferson County Board of Education? How does this order impact daily decision of the HCS?

Stout v. Jefferson County Board of Education is a lawsuit that began in the federal court in 1965 and resulted in a court order in 1971 that gave decision making authority over much of Jefferson County Board of Education operations to the federal court in an effort to ensure desegregation orders were being followed. When Hoover formed its own school system in the late 1980's, the newly formed HCS remained under the authority of the original court order. Under the terms of the order, the court must review and approve any decisions made by HCS that impacts instruction. This includes just about every area of decision making, but pays special attention to guarantee equity in things like attendance zones, facilities, transportation, extra curricular activities, and hiring of faculty and staff. These 6 areas are commonly referred to as the "Green Factors" which is a reference to separate federal court case around similar issues. Additionally, the court order says that in-order to ensure equal quality of education between white and black students, academic offerings and discipline must also be taken into consideration. As part of the court order, HCS must submit regular reports to the judge to confirm that we are in compliance.

The court order will remain in place until all parties to the lawsuit, HCS, NAACP Legal Defense Fund and the U.S. Department of Justice are in agreement that we are able to meet all requirements set out by the court order and the federal judge over our case, the Honorable Madeline Haikala grants unitary status. In the last several years, HCS has made great strides and has committed a huge amount of human and financial resources in the hope of moving us towards unitary status. Our central office leadership should be commended for their dedication and leadership to this enormously important task.

When we are talking about a court case that began over half a century ago, I understand that there is confusion for some and maybe even frustration for others when the topic of unitary status is again in the news. I will confess that until I began my service on HCS Parent Equity Committee, I did not fully realize the scope of what leaders like Dr. Murphy, Dr. Lamar and the members of the BOE were working to accomplish on our behalf. The road to achieving unitary status may be long but I believe it is worth every bit of talent and time we must give to it. This work is the work of self evaluation and self improvement. In order for HCS to sufficiently meet each of the Green Factors, it will require us to examine ourselves and our practices with a critical eye. If we give our best to this work the end result will be a school system that we know, without a shred of doubt or shadow of hesitation, is providing the same high quality

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educational experience for every single student in the HCS family, regardless of their race.

15. HCS is one of the most diverse school systems in the State, with 53 different languages spoken in the home. What is the role of the HCS in the area of racial diversity and equity conversations?

I understand the size and diversity of our system presents challenges that are in some ways unique to HCS, especially as compared to the systems around us. I believe that the diversity of HCS is also gift to every member of the HSC family and we should work to embrace it as the asset that it is. As we look across our schools system, there are many examples of ways that we are leaning into the benefit of our system's diversity to both teach and cultivate a greater sense of community. For example I have loved the intentional way that multicultural celebrations have evolved at our schools, even in this year of pandemic, schools found creative ways for students to proudly share with their classmates and teachers about their language, culture, race or religion. I was excited to learn during a recent HCS Parent Equity meeting that teachers at our high schools were working together to develop an African American Literature class and that idea of similar classes focused on the literary talents and perspectives of other racial and cultural subgroups are being discussed for future development. I also know that HCS has made commitments to focus on concerns around equity and diversity in their professional development opportunities for our faculty and staff.

16. What is your understanding of the early intervention program that HCS offers and the impact it has on the students involved? What is the budget, outreach, and services provided?

I am not afraid to say that is an area of HCS that I do not know a lot about. I am aware that HCS has a long standing and successful program for preschool students with special needs. Early intervention programs in the area of speech-language pathology are provided by HCS personnel in HCS facilities. My understanding is that these programs begin when the child is 3 years old and are funded through federal dollars provided to the state. I also know that we added a preschool program that was not exclusively focused on students with special needs a couple of years back and that it is housed in HCS elementary schools on both sides of our feeder pattern. This program is funded through a grant run by the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education. This program is limited in size due to both funding and available classroom size.

What I believe is that there is great value in providing early intervention programs not only for our students but also for school system. We know that the window of information acquisition for children opens around the age of 3 and if we wait until they are 6 to begin our education work, we are missing 3 crucial years of brain formation. While I am not an expert, I have seen research and have listened to education experts who say, early identification of learning challenges, gives us the time to work with the child so that they may acquire the necessary skills rather the development of deficits. If we make it a priority to focus on early childhood intervention, our entire kindergarten population will enter elementary school better equipped to learn and be empowered for

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success. The long term impact of early intervention for HCS means high standardized test rates later on in the students academic career. We have decades of studies that tell us that very small things, like reading to a child for just 20 minutes has a direct connection to higher test scores. If 20 minutes a day of reading to a child can provide them with millions of exposures to vocabulary words that actually translate into higher scores and achievement, imagine what something like a HCS Early Education Center could accomplish? There would be no stopping us!

17. HCS receives local, state, and federal funding. Please explain your understanding of each.

The 3 primary sources of funding for HCS are the local, state, and federal governments, with 51% of our overall funding coming from local sources. The majority of that local funding comes from tax revenues with real estate taxes accounting for the bulk of those dollars. With that said, it should be noted that HCS is also fortunate to benefit from a great deal of local support that comes directly through our City Council. The City of Hoover currently gives just over \$5 million dollars directly to the funding of HSC operating budget. From my understanding, this does not include the additional money that the city has placed in the budget of the Hoover Police Department for the funding of our SRO program, which allows for a Hoover Police Officer in every HCS. All of this adds up to huge financial support from the City of Hoover for HCS schools. After local funds, the rest of HCS budget is made up mostly by state funds which account for 43% of the overall budget and federal funds that provides right at 5% of our budget dollars.