

**Open Work Session**  
**Wicomico County School Board, District 3 Interviews**  
**April 16, 2019**

Mr. Cannon invited Mr. Gains Hawkins to come before Council. Mr. Hawkins introduced himself, and said he is a candidate for the District 3 Wicomico School Board vacancy. He said Council has a longer background piece that he submitted, and this will be considerably shorter. He said he is the son of teachers and college graduates, the husband of a Wicomico County teacher, and all four of his children are products of public school each graduating from Parkside, and three are now college graduates. He said he went to public schools, and graduated from the University of Maryland College Park. He said he moved to Salisbury in 1966, and retired six years ago after a 33-year career in higher education administration to include 23 years at Salisbury University, and 10 years at UMES. He said he believes a first rate public school system is vital to the economic, social, and cultural future of Wicomico in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that places an increasing value on having a highly educated workforce. He said Wicomico is blessed with what he calls their community's four pillars - Salisbury University, one of the Nation's best regional universities; PRMC, cited by Health Grades as one of the best 250 hospitals in the Country; Perdue Farms, ranked 89<sup>th</sup> by Forbes in its list of America's largest private companies; and the Wicomico River, a sublime natural resource that benefits them in myriad ways. He said the foundation for their future, though, is their public school system. He said it should be their highest priority to ensure it is not simply the best they can afford, but rather simply the best. He said Wicomico's future success hinges on becoming recognized as a smart community that publically embraces the importance it places on an excellent public school system. Mr. Hawkins said he finds fulfillment in being an active participant in a community with a shared commitment to the common good. He said he feels he can make a contribution to their community as a member of the School Board team.

Mr. Cannon invited Mrs. Tonya Laird Lewis to come before Council. Mrs. Lewis introduced herself, and said she is currently a stay-at-home mom, and an active substitute in Wicomico County. She said she is highly involved, and a dedicated parent within the County. She said her career objective is to maintain a positive, collaborative, and cooperative relationship within the schools, and with the Board officials, the Wicomico County Council, and City members to enhance her educational and professional skills in an environment which advocates for the learning and safety for children. She said, for those on Council who have heard her speak before, they are well aware that it is all about the children. She said it is about what they do to make the environment they are in conducive, effective, and to create wonderful individuals who are going to go out into society and become scholars, and be beneficial to the work environment. She said she also attended UMES where she earned a degree in biology, and she played there on the softball team. She said the requirements for a master's in teaching were also gained there as well. She said what she can offer Wicomico county is that she is a strong collaborator, has leadership skills, effective time management, the ability to work under pressure, a positive attitude, the willingness to adapt, she is creative, and has logical thinking skills. She said one of the main things she would like to do if she is selected to be in this position is to increase the open lines of communications between the schools and the Wicomico County Board of Education, and her intention is to do that by reaching the parents where they are. She clarified, they have multiple students with multiple learning levels, and they have parents who have those same exact levels, so they need to do what they can to make them aware of the concerns and issues that are going on in the County in a situation which they can understand. She said she has so many things she would love to bring to the table.

Mrs. Lewis said there is a committee called the Parent Advisory Committee, and she is the school representative for both Willards and Pittsville to the Board of Education currently. She said the parents trust her, they come to her with issues and concerns, they confide information in her, which she can relay to administrators as well as Board officials to, hopefully, take care of some of the issues that are occurring in their schools. She said she knows Council watches the news and is well aware of the critical issues they have going on right now in their County. She said they are alarming, the factors that are occurring with discipline in their County are alarming, and one of the things they need to do is to make sure they are upholding the guidelines of the Code of Conduct. She said they need to be holding their children accountable, and they need to be holding their parents accountable because, again, their goal here is to create scholars, not to create conflicts, and she feels that being able to have a cooperative relationship with parents is going to head off some of the alarming factors they are currently dealing with in the County. She concluded, she is sure Council will be asking questions that will deal with many of the other points that she would like to bring up.

Mr. Cannon said Council will first direct questions to Mr. Hawkins and then to Mrs. Lewis with the same question, and then with the next question they will rotate it where Mrs. Lewis would be asked the question first, and then Mr. Hawkins, and that way it can be a fair balance.

Mr. Dodd said his question pertains to Mrs. Lewis because she mentioned her masters in teaching (MAT). He then asked if she got her MAT, to which Mrs. Lewis responded, she actually went through the program and was hired in Wicomico County. She explained, they put teachers on a provisional certificate. She said she missed the test by one point, and then her husband and her got married, they started a heating and air business, and had two children. She said she went back to do all the course work and get all of that up to date, but UMES does not have a collaborative unit currently with Wicomico County, and Wicomico County would not accept any of the prior course work for her to go through and reinstate that certificate. Mr. Dodd asked if there is a collaboration with Salisbury University, to which Mrs. Lewis responded, there is one with Salisbury University, but the homeschool is where they enroll, and she received her bachelors of biology from UMES, so that is where the bulk of her credits were from. She said Dr. Briggs actually worked with her very extensively, and they went to UMES, had meetings, and met with members of the Board of Education to try to get this process going. She said Dr. Briggs actually brought her on board to fill a long-term science position for him at Bennett High School. She said they made multiple attempts, but the bond the County has with UMES is not as strong as it is with Salisbury when it comes to academic credits and extensions, and things of those sort.

Mr. Holloway said they know they have a really bad discipline problem in their schools, and they keep hearing that hands are tied because of the Department of Justice ruling where, basically, they cannot expel some students, and they cannot suspend some students. He then asked what they see as being a solution to that problem. He said nobody else knows the solution, but he wants to get their opinion. Mr. Hawkins said he has talked to some former Board Members, and what they told him was people do not realize how much they do not know about the school system until they become a Board Member, so he says upfront that he is not privy to a lot of background in terms of discipline issues, and the challenges many of their parents, faculty, administrators and students face. He said he thinks the pre-k program could actually be a benefit. He said, again, he is an old guy, but he remembers the discipline problems he experienced when he was school age, and it was usually from kids who did not want to be in school for a variety of reasons. He said it was not so much drugs or single-parent homes back then, but kids did not feel confident in school, so they would act out accordingly. He said he got in his fair share of playground tussles with other kids, so the more they can bring kids into the classroom at an earlier age, they can enhance their confidence when they enter. He said many of these kids who are not confident in

school have nobody reading to them before they get to school. He said he is very hopeful that the earlier they get kids into a classroom exposed to reading, increase their confidence, and put them in a social environment which expects them to behave, he thinks could yield some positive outcome.

Mr. Cannon asked Mrs. Lewis to expand on her position as far as pre-k is concerned because that is a hot item. Mr. Holloway said that was not the question, to which Mr. Cannon responded, the question was on discipline, but he would also like to hear her response to pre-k. Mrs. Lewis said discipline is, actually, one of the most critical issues facing Wicomico County currently. She said discipline is the practice of training to obey, and the training is going to begin in pre-k when they expose them to following rules and guidelines, being around other individuals outside of a small daycare setting, and out of the comfort of being home with grandparents and parents. She said, however, if they look the definition up, it also says to obey rules or a code of conduct, and using punishment to correct the disobedience, but she feels that currently is where the County is lacking. She said they have a Code of Conduct for a reason, so they need to make sure they are following the rules and procedures in the Code of Conduct when they are disciplining a student. She said they need this, students need this, teachers need this, staff needs this, and sometimes the parents need this. She said, as a County standing strong, they need to be enforcing discipline. She said, currently, with the guidelines for the Department of Justice, they are backing down because, if they were addressing these issues when they first start to arise following the Code of Conduct, it would not accelerate to the situations occurring now in the schools where SROs are being put in dangerous positions, and students are being put in dangerous positions. She said she was at Bennett High School with Dr. Briggs, and there were multiple issues that occurred there in that school that needed to be addressed. She said there were days a student did something that was inappropriate, and they were right back in her classroom the next day. She said that possibly could be following the Code of Conduct, but it is also possible that it did not follow the Code of Conduct to a T. She said discipline needs to be the focus within their County, and they need to make sure they are not allowing the students to feel that it is acceptable to portray this behavior day after day after day. She said it is a habit, a learned behavior, and they are doing in day after day, so, therefore, for them it is becoming acceptable. She said they have to try to break the habit 44 times, but they do not have 44 parts to their Code of Conduct. She asked why they are allowing their students to go through this. She said consistency is the key to change. She said the majority of these students receiving disciplinary conduct are acting out because there is an underlying issue, and they could give them the services they need, such as mental health courses. She said, if there is a student who has an issue, such as oppositional defiance, or whatever the situation may be, they should be offered the services they need in the County, and visiting with the social workers that every school in the County should have, but does not, so they are doing the children a disservice. She said they are not learning the behaviors and how to correct them at home, and they are with the schools seven hours a day, so there is no reason they cannot give them the services they need. She said she knows that, on the professional days coming up, there are multiple schools offering a mental health awareness to the teachers as part of their professional development because they need to know how to handle these students who are struggling. She said they can address the underlying issue, and they can address their situation, but the issue with that is whether they are being given the consequence in the full degree of punishment for the action they are completing. She said, if they do not give them a consequence, they will continue to do it again with the thought that it is deemed appropriate in the setting, whether they are at home, or whether they are at school.

Mr. McCain asked, putting on their future hats to have a 21<sup>st</sup> century school system, what ideas would they bring to the table as a School Board Member that would help them move into the next generation of education. He then asked if there is anything innovative, any trends, or ideas that they see education moving to in the future. Mrs. Lewis said her own situation is of going to college, receiving a four-year

degree, and teaching in Wicomico County, but she is currently a stay-at-home mom with a bachelor's degree in biology. She said she also has all her teaching courses from the MAT program under her belt, as well as a CNA/GNA, but she is currently a stay-at-home mom representing both of her children's schools. She said Wicomico County does a fantastic job of allowing students the opportunity to be prepared to attend a four-year university, which she feels is wonderful. She said there are an array of courses that prepare students for this, but she feels in the future they need to tap into the unknown resource of the CTE program. She said it is something that is most beneficial since the students in their school systems have a broad spectrum of learning strategies. She said some students are hands-on, and some students are not test takers, so they should put them in the path of the CTE program. She said they can give them a skill, give them the resources they are going to need to go out and get a job, to be a blue collar worker, to feel successful, and to be able to provide for their family, and not just think the only way they can go to college is to go to a four-year university. She said she really thinks that when they do career days for their high schools, they need more CTE and more technical schools that are on that list. She said, at the last Parent Advisory Committee meeting, they passed around a form with all the universities that were going to be at the fair. She said there was not one technical school listed. She repeated, not one. She then asked if Council knows the amazing technical schools they have in Maryland, and their adjoining States, and said it would be an asset for some of these students who are not prepared to attend a four-year university. She said she thinks they need to jump on the CTE program and promote it. She said they need to have local business owners who own blue collar businesses come in and start talking to the middle school students. She said she has a child in middle school, and he may not be on a four-year university track, but she bets she could give him something to do with his hands, and he would feel successful. She said she thinks they need to bring that into the middle schools and start working with them to give them a track to be based on so they are prepared when they hit Parkside to attend the CTE program. She said they need to bring technical schools in when they do their college fairs, and then push these students into an avenue that is going to make them feel successful.

Mr. Hawkins said technology changes everything, as they know, and none of them had cell phones when they went to school, but now kids need those cell phones to do their multiplication, and he sees the impact social media has had on people's writing skills to where it has deteriorated. He said, as he said from the outset, for Wicomico school system to meet the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills market, job market, and workforce requirements, this community has to say education is their highest priority. He said that means members of the County Council, the County Executive, the business community, and people who are administrators and faculty at schools, and it means the School Board. He said they have to say this is the most important thing they can do, not only for the kids, but for the community as a whole. He said, if they do not do that, he just thinks they are doomed to mediocrity. He said he hears people say they do not have the funds. He said most of Council was around in the 1970s, so many of them know the history of Salisbury State College, which is when he joined that institution in 1979. He said it was, basically, open admission where one could show up on the first day and ask if they could get in, and they were accepted. He said Dr. Tom Bellevance came in and said they were going to raise the standards and strive for academic excellence, and they wanted to attract the best and the brightest to Salisbury State College. He said people would ask where their kid could go if they could not get into any other school, and they could always go to Salisbury. He said he was in charge of the promotion end of Dr. Bellevance's marketing strategy, so he dealt with many of the queries from parents asking why their kid could not get into Salisbury State, so there was a lot of flow back to that effort. He said, over time, when people ask what is so great about Wicomico County, Salisbury University is the top of the list, but that took leadership. He said somebody said they can become an excellent institution, and they can prove that higher education in Wicomico County can attract outstanding students, outstanding faculty, and provide a really significant economic boost to the community, although that was certainly,

secondary. He said what they can do in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is say public school education is the most important thing for them and for everybody, not just the kids, but for all of them.

Mr. Hastings said they had a presentation earlier from the Maryland Association of Counties regarding the Kirwan Commission. He then asked if either of the candidates had any comments or thoughts on any of the efforts the State is taking, or any specific thoughts on Kirwan. Mr. Hawkins said he has not studied it to a great degree, but it is going to mean more money and more expectations. He said he certainly is a believer in benchmarks, and it is not enough to just dole out money, but they need to have outcomes to go with them. He said there are going to be expectations, as he reads it, on the local level, and it is not just the State saying they are going to give them a check, so they will see how it goes, but he is excited because he believes in the commitment the State has in producing the highest rated school systems in the Country. He said they used to have that recognition, but they no longer do, so he thinks it is great for attracting businesses to the State. He said Mr. McCain is in real estate, and he knows how important it is to attracting businesses that they have a reputation as having an outstanding public school system.

Mrs. Lewis said there are a lot of requirements and expectations that come from the State for the students in each classroom, and along with that comes multiple forms and levels of testing, and, of course, those expectations have to be met for those funds. She said each school in the County receives a certain amount of funds for students in the County. She said the only concern and issue she has with the expectations and requirements to receive the money is their special education population, whether they are meeting them where they are, whether they are advocating so the parents understand what is going on with these requirements, and whether the special education students are being prepared to take these assessments that the County is receiving money for. She said, as a parent of a child with a learning disability who struggles on these assessments, when they are done with their testing, it has all of these different types of bar graphs and charts, and they see that their child is below level. She said it is great that the County is receiving this money, but what are they going to do to bring this child's score up so they feel successful now that the County has the money? She said her concern is meeting all students where they are, and giving them the resources they need yet again to be scholars in the County.

Mr. Kilmer said the Magnet Program has been controversial in the past. He then asked what their thoughts are on the Magnet Program. Mrs. Lewis asked if he means the program that is currently at North Salisbury, to which Mr. Kilmer responded, yes. Mrs. Lewis said she has actually been a substitute at North Salisbury with Assistant Principal Baker, so she has been in that building, and observed some of those classes. She said those children are working, they are successful, and they are excelling in what the curriculum is. She said there is also the new STEM Program that is now at Salisbury Middle, and the rigor of that program is very difficult as well. She said they have students from Pittsville who were accepted into the program. She said, being a pilot program, she feels it needs work, and there needs to be a certain level of accountability that is all across the board. She said there are some students who have come back simply due to the requirements. She explained, there may be six or seven hours of homework over the weekend, as well as two or three additional hours of homework in the evenings. She said they are learning and excelling, and are they preparing their students from the mainstream public school to go into these programs, but it is a pilot program, so it is very hard to tell. She said she thinks their County absolutely needs it because there are students who are getting left behind in the classroom because they are excelling above and beyond, and then they are becoming complacent. She said they are not being pushed to the maximum amount of ability they can do, so she thinks these programs are working, but she thinks that, like any program in the County or the State, it is going to need to be revised, and she thinks that is just going to be a learning process for everyone at this point.

Mr. Hawkins said he was around when the Magnet Program was introduced, and it was controversial then because it was a departure from previously where all students were mixed and took classes together. He said, to be honest, he was not really crazy about it, but then his son got accepted. He said his two younger daughters went to Fruitland, and they opted not to do the program because they had a core group of kids they were friends with who were all good students, so they just went through the Intermediate School in Fruitland, and went on and had very successful high school and college careers. He said he does not know all of the details about where they are with the Magnet Program right now, so he would have to study it. He said he goes back to what Mr. Ollinger told him, which is that he does not know a lot about what is going on in the school system, so before he gives some opinion about something without really immersing himself in the issues that are confronting the program, the pros and cons, he would reserve an opinion until he feels more confident in talking about it.

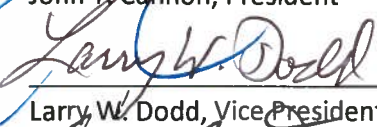
Mr. Dodd asked, if they get confirmed to the Board, do they plan on completing the next three and a half years, and do they plan on running for reelection, to which Mr. Hawkins responded, he guesses so, but he will see how those three and a half years go. He said District 3 includes Parkside, Bennett Middle, and the two Fruitland schools. He said, after initial orientation, he would hope to visit those schools, administrations, and PTAs because he thinks his first priority is to represent the residents of District 3, not just the students and parents, but everybody because everybody has an interest in a successful school system. He said he certainly wants to make his contribution to conversations about strategic planning overall, and he knows they have supervisory responsibilities for the superintendent. He said he needs to get to know the schools and the people involved, and see if he is making a difference. He said he has been on lots of Boards and has had leadership positions, and has stayed on some for 12 years, but some for 2 years because he wants to make sure he is making a contribution. He said he has also managed Boards, and has had people come on Boards who just want to show up, and that is not his style. He said he will spend three and a half years on the Board, and then make that decision. Mr. Dodd said he would encourage Mr. Hawkins to visit all the schools because he is going to be making decisions for all of them, to which Mr. Hawkins responded, he realizes that, and intends to do that, but, as a District 3 representative, he feels he should really be an expert on those schools as much as possible.

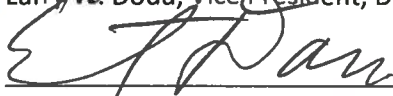
Mrs. Lewis said, if she is selected to fill this position, as a potential Board Member she would implement as many positive avenues and programs as she can into the County, not just for the schools in her district, but other schools. She said one main thing she would love to push forward for the next three years, and then hopefully reelection, would be a substitute readiness program, which would encompass every single school in Wicomico County. She said they have substitutes coming in and out of schools, but they are not prepared to be in the schools because they have not visited them, and they do not know the administrators. She said they have a wonderful program, but that is one of her main goals, and she would love to be able to see that through as one of her primary things to implement to be effective in their County. She said, as long as she is representing the schools, the parents, and the community to the best of her ability, she will plan to continue to run and fill the District 3 position on the Board.

Mr. Cannon asked, if they found a million dollars in the budget, what would be their first priority, to which Mrs. Lewis responded, there are certain things she is very adamant about, but, if there was a million dollars in the budget, the first thing she would do is make sure all of their schools were safe. Mr. Hawkins said he would defer to the Superintendent and Board, who have already done a lot of research and have developed priorities, so he would go to them because they are the ones who have done due diligence on what their priorities should be. He said he would start there.


Mr. Cannon thanked them both for being there, and said this process has been more rigorous than they thought starting from day one with their interviews, and then two Public Hearings, and he knows it has been a long road, so Council really thanks them for their tenacity, and putting their hat in the ring. Mr. Hawkins asked what happens next, to which Mrs. Hurley responded, the County Council is required to have a Public Hearing as well, so they will be scheduling that in the very near future. She said they are on a deadline of June 3, 2019 from the date their names were submitted to Council. Mr. Hawkins asked if it will be a Public Hearing where Council discusses the candidates, to which Mr. Cannon responded, he was talking to Mrs. Hurley during their break about how he thinks this whole process of Public Hearings is way too onerous, so he thinks they are going to have to try to see how they can reduce that some. He said they will have the Public Hearing for public input, and it is not necessary for the two candidates to be there. He said the process is that they will have the Public Hearing, and they could vote that same day, or defer it to the following meeting. Mrs. Hurley said it does have to be advertised, and they have a lot of Public Hearings already scheduled for May 7<sup>th</sup> because that is the night of their budget hearing, so she will have to work that out with the Council President, and then they will let the candidates know. Mr. Cannon asked if it will be the first meeting in June, to which Mrs. Hurley responded, Council has to approve one of them by June 3<sup>rd</sup>. Mr. Cannon asked if there is enough of a timeframe to advertise it for the second meeting in May, to which Mrs. Hurley responded, if they do it at the May 21<sup>st</sup> meeting, they are having the Public Hearing and making the approval on the same night. She said, if they decide to have the Public Hearing on May 7<sup>th</sup>, which, again, she just mentioned that they have a very busy schedule that night, then they could have the Public Hearing, and then wait until May 21<sup>st</sup> to make their decision. Mr. Cannon said that gives them enough time to advertise. There was no further discussion.

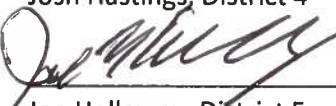
  
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John T. Cannon, President

  
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Larry W. Dodd, Vice President, District 3

  
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Ernest F. Davis, District 1

  
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Marc Kilmer, District 2

  
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Josh Hastings, District 4

  
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Joe Holloway, District 5

  
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William R. McCain, At-Large

  
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Laura Hurley, Council Administrator