



Robert A. Silkworth

Candidate for Board of Education in District 2
Anne Arundel County Public Schools

EDUCATION

I am a product of the Anne Arundel County Public School system, having graduated from Park Elementary, Brooklyn Park Elementary and Brooklyn Park Junior/Senior High School. I attended Anne Arundel Community College and Towson State University and graduated with a degree in Secondary Education.

WORK EXPERIENCE

I am a veteran, having served 6 years in the United States Army Reserves from 1967 to 1972, training to operate amphibious craft.

I began my teaching career at Southern Junior High School in September of 1972. Two years later I became Department Chairperson of the World Classical Language Department at Brooklyn Park Junior/Senior High School. When Brooklyn Park merged with Andover High School in 1990, I was chosen as the Chairperson of the World Classical Language Department. I am the only remaining original teacher at North County High School. In November of 2019 I was inducted into the North County Hall of Fame, the first class of people to be honored for their dedication to the school.

During my teaching career I have also been involved in our sports programs. I was a basketball coach for 15 years, and I became the "Voice of the Bees" for Brooklyn Park High School and later the "Voice of the Knights" after we opened in 1990. As "Voice of the Knights" I announce football, basketball, lacrosse, soccer and other sports when needed, a job which I still enjoy.

For over 15 years I have also been the main TAAAC representative for the North County staff and I serve as the chairperson on the North County High School Faculty Council. The Faculty Council exists by contract as a group of teachers to meet with the principal on a monthly basis in order to advise the principal about any important school matters or concerns. Additionally, I serve on the TAAAC High School Concerns Committee, which meets monthly to discuss specific concerns for high schools, and I have been the chair of the committee for the past 5 years. Finally, I serve on the ASI-TAAAC Advisory Group which meets monthly with BOE staff to discuss high school concerns, particularly of an instructional nature. This is an important collaborative group that I have been honored to be a part of for over 5 years.

WHY HAVE I DECIDED TO RUN FOR THE BOARD?

I was asked that very question at a recent public event, and I responded with a question of my own. I said, "Why do you think I decided to run?" The answer from this person was simple. "You decided to run for the kids." That is precisely why.

We are at a critical time during this transitional period from an appointed to an elected school board. I have the experience, the knowledge and hopefully the wisdom to be able to be a productive member of the Anne Arundel County Board of Education from the very first day.

I believe in the power of relationships. There are many issues facing us today and we will not all agree. We must, however, agree to respectfully communicate and collaborate with one another in order to guarantee that we make the best decisions for our students and communities. The success of our students depends on the positive relationships between all stakeholders.

Several of my former students have served on the Board of Education of Anne Arundel County and have done so very well. I am proud of them and their work. We have not always agreed but we have always respected one another and made decisions in the best interests of our students. Perhaps now it is time for their teacher to take his place on the Board of Education of Anne Arundel County. I hope the people of Anne Arundel County, who have trusted me for 48 years to teach their children, will trust me again to represent District 2 on the Anne Arundel County School Board of Education. Our students deserve the best and I do believe in my heart that I am qualified. My commitment to the students of this county will be as great as it has ever been.

MY PLAN

The Power of Relationships

At the beginning of every school year for the past 48 years I have had the privilege and honor to teach in Anne Arundel County. As a veteran teacher and mentor of students and teachers I have learned the power of relationships. The most important lesson I have learned over the years is that for the first two weeks of the school year the goal should be to build relationships with all stakeholders.

In the classroom, one must build relationships with students by showing them that you teach because you care about them and because you truly want to make a positive difference in their lives. It must be legitimate because students can see through the lack of sincerity.

One of the secrets to creating meaningful relationships is simply getting to know the people involved. What are their interests, likes and dislikes and how can you tie them in with your own? Be willing to be a good listener. As a teacher, you will learn a great deal about the students you serve.

For your students, in the beginning you are just another one of those ordinary teachers. To them you are not special or unique! You become unique and special by caring and spending quality time with them in class, getting to know them and how they learn as well as how they think. Show them respect, but expect respect in return.

In today's world, some students come to the classroom unwilling to listen and participate because they do not know you any more than you know them. Therefore, in their mind there is no need for respect or obedience. The creation of a positive relationship will result in trust and understanding, and then learning can flourish. It will not happen immediately, but it will happen.

The creation of a positive relationship is important whether between students and teachers in class, teachers and administrators in schools or Board of Education members and the superintendent and his staff.

Anyone who knows me recognizes my philosophy. Care enough to become involved. Get to know your fellow workers and your colleagues. Build solid relationships with one another, share and collaborate. Be willing to sit across the table in order to dialogue and, if need be, agree to disagree. One of the greatest assets any large organization has is the expertise of those in that organization. Great things have been happening here in Anne Arundel County for some time, and I believe more greatness is to come.

More challenges are on the horizon, but I believe that I have the experience and the knowledge of the school system in this county to be a member of the Board of Education. I already have great relationships with many stakeholders and there will not be a tremendous learning curve for me. I believe that I can be a valuable member of the Board of Education from the very first day in office.

School Safety

All parents and guardians have the expectation that their children are safe in school. This must be one of our first priorities. Any investment we make in the safety of our students and staff is a good investment. We need to be proactive rather than reactive and we need to continue to find ways to guarantee the safety of everyone.

I know that there have been many projects under way to ensure the safety of our students and staff by making modifications to the buildings. Such modifications were made at North County High School. Cameras and video feeds have been added to many schools and they play an important role in maintaining safety and security.

Unfortunately, bullying is still taking place in our schools, and it has taken on different dimensions with the changes in technology. I have been a “bully blocker” for many years and as the “Voice of the Knights” I have made many announcements that make it clear that everyone has the right to be happy and no one has the right to take that happiness away. The bullies need to know that they will face stiff consequences, but more importantly, the bullies also need help to ensure that the negative behavior can stop.

The School Resource Officer plays an important role in our schools and, at North County High School, our SRO has always served us well. In one case, an intruder with the intent to harm one of our students was stopped, and in another case a student with a knife was disarmed. We are much safer with our SRO in our building.

There is no place for fighting or violence of any kind in our schools. Still, fighting is a problem from time to time, though most take place for the silliest of reasons. Some students choose to fight in school because they feel it is safer to do so than to do so in the community. We must provide opportunities for counseling and restorative practices to get to the heart of the problem. Restorative practices, when implemented by highly trained professionals, can and will make a difference. We must also make sure that there are consequences for students. The goal of discipline is a change in behavior, and that change is less likely when there are no consequences.

Family involvement is important. When families experience issues, they are often frustrated because they simply do not know what else to do. We need to be able to provide resources to help them. There are resources in Anne Arundel County, but many do not know they exist. Through positive collaboration and cooperation with one another, we can make a difference.

Mental Health

For many years I have advocated for additional staff to help our students who struggle with mental health concerns. Suicide is real, and parents would be surprised to know that so many of our students have had thoughts of taking their own lives. In the past two years, I have had far too many cases of students contemplating suicide. One student handed me a note as she walked out the door. In her note she said she was having thoughts about harming herself. I contacted the appropriate professional staff and she and her family were provided professional help, which was successful. When she returned to school, she had some make-up testing to finish and I asked her why she gave me the note. Her reply was "because I knew that you knew what to do."

Thankfully, I did know and it is important that everyone knows what to do. We can be proactive in this area by providing all students access to mental health services through guidance counselors, PPW workers and social workers. Additional county resources are also available. We need to make sure that these services are provided to all students.

As a member of the Board of Education, I will advocate for training for all so that everyone knows what to do when someone is in crisis. I will continue to support additional staff to guarantee mental health safety for everyone.

Fair Compensation for All Staff

Over the course of my 48 years as a teacher in Anne Arundel County, I must say that I was treated well in terms of step increases and pay increases and bonuses. The same cannot be said for many staff members in this county. That is the bad news. The good news is that we have a county executive and a county council who have committed themselves to making everyone whole. I have every expectation that it will be accomplished. It is the responsibility of all stakeholders to work together to make it happen. This requires a full and complete understanding of the impact of lost steps on all staff. Some were impacted much more negatively than others. A fair and just solution must be found by collaboration among the stakeholders involved. I have total confidence that such a solution will be found.

We cannot forget many of the stakeholders in our school system other than teachers and administrators. There has been and continues to be a shortage of well-qualified substitutes. Part of the reason is of course the pay. The substitute pay was raised by \$10.00 last year and I believe there is a budget request this year for an additional \$10.00 in pay. I applaud this and I suggest that it is still not enough. I believe we should do more in terms of providing our valued substitutes with other compensation and incentives. I am a member of the ASI-TAAAC Advisory Group, and we have had this discussion for some time and progress has been made.

As a member of the Board of Education I will advocate for fair and equitable compensation for all staff.

Meeting the Needs of All Students

It is the responsibility of Anne Arundel County and Anne Arundel County Public Schools to meet the needs of ALL students. Over the course of my career I have seen many examples of decisions made to do just that. I have taught at North County High School since it opened in 1990 and the very existence of the school is the result of the need to guarantee Andover and Brooklyn Park students the opportunities to take AP courses which were not available in the smaller school setting. North County High School provided a greater chance for equity to our students.

With the building of the new Crofton High School, we will have 13 different high school communities. We must recognize the needs of each cluster and we must allocate resources based on those needs. I believe that we have been doing that to some degree. North County, Meade, Old Mill and Glen Burnie are 4 examples of schools facing great challenges. The students who go to these schools have the same hopes and dreams as everyone else and they deserve the best we can give them. To guarantee that we meet the needs of ALL students, we will need to review and revise some of our allocations and we will need to communicate and collaborate with stakeholders in each community in order to seek solutions.

As a member of the Board of Education I will focus on the specific needs of those schools facing great challenges and I will always be an advocate for the equity of ALL students in Anne Arundel County.

School Construction

The recent capital budget includes a great deal of funding for many projects including the Old Mill project, which will be on-going for some years, and it is great to hear that a commitment has been made to fund this project.

There are other needs in this county for new construction and renovations and maintenance. We must continue to collaborate with the communities involved and the County Council and the County Executive as well as our local and state politicians to continue to plan for the future of Anne Arundel County Public Schools. Glen Burnie High School is a prime example of a great need and we must make sure that we assess all of the needs by collaborating with community members and stakeholders to guarantee that school construction in this county is what it must be in order to meet the needs of this growing county and its population.

As a member of the Board of Education I will reach out to communities to make sure that we have a good understanding of the needs for new construction and maintenance of existing buildings.

Curriculum

The Division of Curriculum & Instruction uses the latest educational research and best practices to prepare and offer quality curriculum, learning experiences, teacher professional development and appropriate assessments so that our students from birth to age 21 will achieve social, emotional, and academic successes.

I believe the above statement, which appears on the AACPS website, is true. Based on my experience, many professionals spend a great deal of time and effort on curricular issues. In fact, there are some great things happening in our schools every day.

For me the key word is “relevance.” Students need to experience learning situations which are relevant to the world in which they live. Students in today’s world need to be able to actively participate in the learning experience and ultimately be able to show us that they can apply the concepts that they have learned.

As a member of the ASI-TAAAC Advisory group, I have had the opportunity to network and collaborate with staff at the central office. We have discussed concerns about our curriculum and this type of collaboration is very healthy and effective.

As a member of the Board of Education, I would like to see an increased level of communication between teachers and staff so that the curriculum our students experience will better prepare them for their life after graduation.

School Start Times

There has been a great deal of debate in recent times about school start times. For some, this has been the basis of their campaign for a position on the Board of Education. Over the past few years, I have listened very carefully.

I can take a journey back in time to the early part of my career as a high school teacher. At Brooklyn Park High School, we did in fact start school at 8:10 a.m. Students were allowed in the building at 8:00 a.m. and dismissal was at about 2:55 p.m. I believe that we must come to grips with this issue and we must make a decision which will be in the best interest of our students.

I must admit that a large majority of students I survey in school tell me that they are not in favor of starting as late as 9:00 a.m. for various reasons. In our cluster, many of our students work after school because the family needs the money to survive. There are many students who would just prefer no change.

I have always made decisions based upon what is in the best interest of my students and sometimes that is a difficult thing to do. My decision must be based not only on what they want, but also on what will benefit them the most as they pursue their education in our schools. I have questions as to the real impact a change in times will have on elementary and middle schools. What will the impact be on our athletic and extra-curricular programs including such programs as art and music? Of course, the question also arises as to the financial impact. I know that there are two recommendations which supposedly do not require additional funding. At this time, I do not have answers to my questions, but I will seek them out.

I do have experience with a later start time and my mind is open. The health and well being of our students are, of course, of utmost importance. Any decision I make will always be based on their well-being. As always, there must be communication and collaboration with all stakeholders, including the students we serve. I strongly recommend that all students be surveyed in order to give them the opportunity to voice their opinions and to express their concerns.

The Achievement Gap or the Attitude Gap?

Closing the gap has been and continues to be a concern. Some years ago, I watched a video by Principal Kafele, a former high school principal, who was asked about the closing of the achievement gap and what his focus was. He said that he never worries about the achievement gap. Instead, he focuses on the “attitude gap”. When I heard that, it really did make a great deal of sense to me as an educator.

I have always called North County High School a “AAA” school. If you **Attend** school regularly with a positive **Attitude** you will **Achieve**. In my experience, the students who are not successful come to school with more of a negative attitude toward learning. For whatever reason, they have experienced failure and, for them, failure is an option. Teenagers often do not see the forest for the trees. They do not think about the future. They live for today with no fear of what tomorrow will bring.

The root of this negative attitude is often based on their environment, family life and low self-esteem. Sometimes there are financial issues, and other times there are family issues such as divorce, an eviction, drug addictions, or family illnesses that often play a role in the negative attitude as well. So many of these reasons are outside of the control of the average teenager.

Some teenagers just do not think that they can do the work we ask of them. There is too much happening. They cannot concentrate. School is not relevant to them. These students are literally standing in their own way. I am amazed by the progress some students make in such difficult circumstances. Through the power of the relationship piece we can show students that they can control their own destiny and that they can rise above the negative issues that have been bringing them down. They have the power of their decision on their side. Once we help them exercise the power of positive decisions in their lives and once they begin to experience some level of success, they will close the attitude gap for themselves. The closing of the achievement gap will follow because of their new positive decisions. The power of relationship building can and will lead to the creation of a positive attitude which will ultimately lead to success and happiness.

Though I will not say that this is easy, I do believe that a greater focus on the “attitude gap” will go a long way to help us close the achievement gap. Principal Kafele stresses 5 things. They are **attitude, relationship, compassion, environment and relevance**. These are all critical to the success of our students and the closing of the achievement gap.

As a Board of Education member I will focus on strategies to close both the “**Attitude Gap**” and the “**Achievement Gap**.”

The Power of the Vote

I have been honored thus far in my career to have taught so many wonderful young people and to have worked alongside some of the best teachers and administrators one might find. We are truly blessed in Anne Arundel County to have so many talented and dedicated educators. I want them to finish their career here in Anne Arundel County because our students deserve the best.

I humbly ask that you exercise your power of the vote to select me, Robert A. Silkworth, as the new member of the Board of Education in District 2. You have trusted me for so long to teach and mentor your children and now I ask that you trust me to be the next member of the Board of Education in District 2 in Anne Arundel County. I will consider it a great honor to do so.