

Name: Joal Hall Broun

Website: broun4schools.org

Occupation: Attorney

Phone Number: (919) 357-3647

Email Address: broun4schools@gmail.com

Years Lived in Carrboro/Chapel Hill: 25 years in December

1) Given the current direction of the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools Board of Education, would you say things are generally on the right track? If not, what specific, major changes you will advocate if elected?

During my tenure, the board has taken bold and decisive steps, focusing on foundational elements to improve education in our community. Through this lens, we aligned investment with key drivers of educational quality and took the following actions:

1. Increased focus on recruitment and retention of quality teachers;
 - Increased teacher compensation enabling recruitment and retention of quality teachers
 - Allocated resources to support top teaching assistants in a grow-our-own teacher training program to begin addressing looming teacher shortages
2. Aligned on key goal of equity and improved outcomes for all students
3. Implemented procedures to improve communication, transparency, and accountability at all levels in the school system
4. Began development of a comprehensive plan for addressing mental health needs and other barriers to learning
5. Hired a strong superintendent who is committed to improving education for all students

So, while we have started the work and overall are on the right track, there is more to be done to strengthen our core. In areas such as: how we provide services to exceptional children, data driven decision making, accountability and understanding program level budget details among others, we must continue to show improvements. I ask for community support to return me to the board to continue our work to ensure that all children have yearly academic growth and are successful in their school careers.

2) Please identify the three most pressing issues the school system faces and how you will address them.

1. *Retention and development of quality teachers and school leaders*
Locally and nationally, there are significantly fewer students entering teacher preparation institutions. For perspective, the State of North Carolina has seen a



decline of 25-30% enrollment in higher education institutions since 2010. In our own backyard, UNC-Chapel Hill no longer even offers an undergraduate education program. To remain competitive in this environment and to ensure the best classroom leaders are engaged to support our students, I will work with fellow board members and district staff to:

- Continue to advocate for competitive compensation for teachers
- Advocate for policies that create environments which encourage teachers to take risks in support of our students
- Provide teacher and staff leadership opportunities, including climate survey and other methods to continue to include teacher and staff perspective in policies and planning
- Continue to invest in grow-our-own programs
- Provide professional development aligned with the needs our district

2. *Facility maintenance and repair needs*

Our community desires school facilities that reflect our high value of education as well as buildings that are safe, easy to navigate spaces for our students, staff, families and community members. Currently, our schools require significant repairs to HVAC, roofs, adequate science lab space and accessibility, classroom and media center improvements, and electrical improvements. I will address this issue by:

- Advocating for increased state and local funding. We need a sustainable investment plan that increases ongoing capital funding to the level necessary to maintain our school facilities. The typical standard of ongoing maintenance is 4-5% of the asset value. Currently, the district receives about 1% of the asset value of our facilities, which impairs our ability to effectively maintain our facilities. Investing at the standard 4-5% level would responsibly maintain district assets and reduce the need for higher spending longer term.
- Communicating with the public on state of facilities. We need to do a better job of helping our community understand the state of our facilities, how we got here, and how the future will be different.

3. *Holistic student and family support including mental health, pre-K investment, and fiscally responsible budgeting in a climate of reduced federal and state funding.*

The district faces declining or stagnating state and federal funding while mental health and other student needs continue to rise. I will address these gaps by:

- Prioritizing district resources to align with highest needs



- Collaboration with community partners - One example is the Family Success Alliance, which allocates resources with the whole family and child in mind. We continue to explore partnerships with our local universities to maximize our current resources
- Advocacy for increased support of public education

Through all of these priorities, the focus on equity is an integral and necessary part of achieving these priorities and making the district a place where all children thrive.

3) What in your public or professional career shows your ability to be an effective member of the board of education? If you've identified specific issues above, what in your record has prepared you to deal with them?

I have extensive experience in working to improve community issues and have had the privilege of serving in a variety of leadership positions in various positions from legal counsel to the Secretary of State of North Carolina to elected positions. In each role, I collaboratively led groups to develop goals and implement plans to meet the goals of the organization. I am proud to have an excellent track record of achieving positive results even with limited resources.

- As a member of the CHCCS Board of Education, I encouraged the administration to create a more equitable school environment by expansion of the restorative justice model in our schools. This expansion included creating district trainers so implementation of the restorative justice model to other schools could be done in a fiscally responsible way.
- I was elected to the Carrboro Board of Alderman where I served from 1999 to 2011. During my tenure, I advocated for a more fiscally responsible capital improvement plan including realistic timelines. This strengthened planning process enabled the board to determine key priorities rather than getting lost in the number of projects. Examples of success include:
 - Board partnership with the state and Orange County to purchase the Adams Tract next to Wilson Park. This purchase increased the town's park space and protected water quality and open areas in the town. This experience demonstrates my ability to partner with other governmental entities to provide greater resources for our constituencies.
 - With the construction of Fire Station 2, we demonstrated financial savvy by partnering with UNC on a long-term rental for the land. This partnership enabled us to access operating funds to actually staff the fire station.
- As assistant general counsel at Self-Help, the largest community development lender in North Carolina and my legal work with the N.C. Department of



Secretary of State, I have led organizations that emphasize creativity, nimbleness, and persistence in support of strong communities.

- My role as a board member of the Orange County Dispute Settlement Center, an organization that offers mediation, facilitation and conflict resolution and restorative justice program trainings, has given me expertise in effectively collaborating with many types of people and environments and delivering great results.

4) Across the state, school districts argued that class-size reductions amounted to an unfunded mandate that would force them to end arts and physical education programs. Earlier this year, the legislature delayed the bulk of the class-size reductions until 2018–19, but did not guarantee additional funding for arts programs and the like. How would you, as a member of the school board, address this issue in the coming year?

I highly support reducing class sizes as teachers can more effectively deliver instruction to each student. However, our base budget is significantly strained to deliver the level of service we provide today and the state has not provided any funding to support this mandate. The financial requirements for our district alone would be substantial. To meet this mandate, CHCCS would likely need to build a new elementary school with capital costs upwards of twenty million dollars (the prior two elementary schools built in the district, cost \$23 million and \$24 million dollars respectively). Another challenge is that the limited number of available land parcels of sufficient size for a school site may increase costs further. Additionally, there would be significant operating costs to hire and staff a new school and there would be strain on the community as this work is done.

I will continue to work with local and state boards, our legislative representatives, organizations and community members to advocate for state funding to enable us to more effectively provide instruction. This includes:

- Communicating the impact of this unfunded mandate to our community
- Leading the board to explore other strategies and tactics in advocacy
- Partnership with local school boards and organizations

What would you do to offer incentives for high-quality teachers to come to or remain in the school system?

See response in questions 1 and 2.

5) Similarly, many urban school districts have complained that, while the state has modestly increased salaries in recent years, state funding is still inadequate. Last year, Orange County taxpayers approved a \$125 million schools bond for infrastructure improvements. Do you believe CCHCS's portion of that amount is sufficient to meet the district's needs? What kind of innovations can you offer to help spend this money wisely?

We are grateful to the voters who supported this bond initiative and the funds will be spent as efficiently as possible to rebuild Chapel Hill High School (the district's oldest high school), consolidate the majority of our Pre-K classes at Lincoln Center (increasing capacity at our elementary schools), and expand our fourth high school, Phoenix Academy.

Unfortunately, facility maintenance has been under-resourced for many years, and bringing our older buildings up to current standards will require additional investment. At the same time, we continue to see increasing escalation in inflation rates in construction costs. So how we continue to maintain our facilities and enable the significant repairs needs at our old schools is an ongoing issue that must be addressed soon.

The board hired a superintendent with experience in building schools. With her expertise, she will provide oversight during the construction phase to control construction costs and provide greater accountability to the public for the funds entrusted to the board.

I will encourage the school board, to continue to work with the board of Orange County Commissioners to seek creative solutions on our capital needs. Both the board and the district leadership have a clear understanding of the challenge of obtaining funds for our capital needs. We are well aware of the need to be efficient in our spending while meeting school safety and accessibility standards. Innovations in saving costs are possible in the integration of sustainable design that will deliver savings in operating costs for utilities and maintenance.

6) Racial academic disparities are a perennial problem in every school system. Please provide fresh ideas you have for addressing this long-running problem.

- Focus on district culture to continue to move to a more supportive and caring environment for all of its students and staff.



- Develop and use curricula that reflect the culturally diverse population our district serves. One example is the use of resources such as the Zinn Education Project which has the goal “to introduce students to a more accurate, complex, and engaging understanding of United States history than is found in traditional textbooks and curricula.” In doing so, this middle school and high school curriculum looks at how groups, not just individuals, acted to make change in this country.
- Assess racial academic disparities from the whole child point of view, evaluating the institutional and systemic barriers that create an opportunity gap through an equity lens. In other words, we must look not only at differences in outcomes between racial groups, but also at differences in inputs of resources.
- Evaluate access to gifted education and the underrepresentation of students of color and young women.
- Continue teacher and staff equity training and focus on eliminating disparate discipline to keep students in the classroom and to create a culture of equity.
- Closely align resource allocation with equity goals and work towards preventing gaps from occurring in the first place, rather than continuing to simply react to them.

7) Schools in the twenty-first century face the task of educating an increasingly diverse student population. What about your background has prepared you to lead a twenty-first-century school system, knowing the unique challenges students from different backgrounds face?

My background is quite diverse. As the daughter of an Air Force veteran, I had many opportunities to live and engage with diverse people and cultures. My experience with family members who have special needs has heightened my sensitivity to making sure all backgrounds are included in our community and have necessary access to resources to meet their needs.

My family is diverse both ethnically and religiously. My Jewish husband and I decided early on to provide our children with opportunities to be exposed to different cultures and backgrounds. With our backgrounds, we have found that while there are differences, those differences have enhanced our relationship and our relationship to our respective families and community.

My legal career beginning as an assistant public defender followed by my role as assistant general counsel of Self-Help gave me the opportunity to work with diverse individuals and to provide quality service to them. I learned that I do not have all the answers, and this leads me to always consider all points of view.

Finally, my experience at Wake Forest University and at the School of Law taught me how to collaborate with students and faculty to create environments that enabled the success of my fellow students. As a member of student government in my undergraduate years, I advocated for creating a more supportive environment for the students of color.

8) After Charlottesville, CCHCS banned the Confederate flag and “other threatening symbols” from its campuses. What more do you think the school board can or should do to foster a safe learning environment for its students of color?

- The school board will continue to work toward creating a supportive environment for all of its students by implementing an equity plan that includes culturally sensitive curriculum. This will include quarterly equity updates to the board and community regarding the implementation of the equity plan so that, if necessary, the district can implement other strategies to meet the District’s equity goals.
- Recognize and support district staff equity work by creating recognition awards for instructional and classified staff who exemplify the best implementation of equity work in the district.
- Continue to identify policies and procedures that support the equity plan and eliminate those policies and procedures that get in the way.
- Provide high quality pre-K education to avoid the development of gaps.
- Include student and community voices in planning and policy setting to understand how to continue to improve student’s feelings of safety in the schools.

9) How do you identify yourself to others in terms of your political philosophy? For example, do you tell people you’re a conservative, a moderate, a progressive, a libertarian?

I have always considered myself to be a progressive because I believe that government can be a catalyst for community improvement. The goal is government that strongly

supports rigorous and enlightening education for everyone. As Nelson Mandela said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." I believe a strong public education system is essential to keep America the land of opportunity for everyone.

10) If there are other issues you want to discuss, please do so here.

Continued work on the implementation of the equity plan: In the early nineties, the district made progress with closing the achievement gap and all students' academic achievement rose. However, toward the end of that decade, when the emphasis shifted away from equity, the gap increased and overall achievement declined.

We cannot rely on prior achievements. The board must be intentional regarding implementation of the equity plan. Without this continued emphasis, we will not achieve our goal of closing the opportunity gap and educating all of our students. I have demonstrated my support for all students and have the expertise to continue this work. I ask for your support.

Thank you,

Joal Broun

