

December 2, 2025

Dear County Executive Fitzwater and County Council:

I eagerly submit my candidacy for the open Board of Education seat. For two decades I have been working tirelessly to help others understand inclusion and equity issues in innovative ways and to help organizations build cultures of true inclusion and belonging for everyone. Nowhere is this more important than in our schools, and I am driven to improve education for all students in the county.

While I have focused on building spaces of inclusion and belonging, my career has also given me experience that is essential for a successful Board member. I've worked through complicated and tight budgets with government organizations such as the NYPD and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid; I've led and collaborated with diverse teams across hundreds of projects; I've communicated in clear, transparent, and authentic ways to employees, students, parents, and community members about sensitive topics; and I've assessed and strategically analyzed systems, policies, and practices with organizations such as Public Citizen most recently.

I've also supported organizations in Frederick County. I've presented workshops to FCPS Equity Reps and leaders; I've keynoted the annual retreat and worked with supervisors at FCPL to integrate my "subtle acts of exclusion" framework into their library procedures; I've provided an equity and inclusion lens and multiple trainings for nurses in the Family Connects program with Frederick Health; and I've volunteered for years (through 2021) as a Commissioner on the HRC. I have also had much firsthand experience with FCPS schools. I live in Middletown, and among my four children, I've had students in all the Middletown schools as well as the Urbana High IB program and the North Frederick magnet program.

When I first became passionate about equity and inclusion, I studied these issues deeply. I spent eight years getting my doctorate in cultural anthropology with an added emphasis on cognitive developmental psychology. My research was based in elementary, middle, and high schools in Brazil, investigating how children of all ages learn about and experience inclusion and exclusion during a fascinating time of culture change. The idea was to uncover some general principles of how culture and cognition work together in ways that would be applicable not just in Brazil, but also in the United States and more broadly.

After earning my degree, I taught about equity and inclusion at Harvard University for three years. My students wrote papers examining explicit and implicit messages about race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality in Disney Princess movies and children's books, language about diversity in Supreme Court Cases, and scholarship about how race and racism developed in the US. I was also driven to innovate how to reach people of all ages. In 2010 I created two iPhone apps to build awareness about race and racism, winning a Games for Change nomination, and resulting in my app being exhibited at the Boston Museum of Science and the San Diego Museum of Man. Many middle and high school classrooms across the country have incorporated the apps in their classrooms.

I left Harvard to conduct applied research in two think tanks in DC, first the FrameWorks Institute and then the American Institutes for Research. Through this work, I focused much of my efforts largely on children's issues and schools. I interviewed nationally recognized experts to understand the real factors for student success; I conducted research with community members to understand how they think about children and schools; and I designed campaigns and interventions to improve the lives of children and families.

For the past eight years, I have been working full time to build cultures of inclusion and belonging for all in a wide variety of organizations, including corporations, nonprofits, government agencies, and many schools. I conducted this work first as a partner at inQUEST Consulting and then later as the owner of my own firm, Iris Inclusion, named for my iris farm in Middletown. With this work, I specialize in speaking to everyone, across race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability, age, and even across different political stances. I aim to build deeper understanding and common ground, more important in today's polarized climate than ever before. It would be an honor to bring my experience and skills to the Board of Education. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Michael D. Baran, Ph.D.