

## **1.**

As an Avery County native and resident, my values have been shaped by family, teachers, and the community. I am running for the Avery County Board of Education because I believe deeply in this community, our kids, and our shared responsibility to prepare students for life, not just tests.

Avery County taught me the value of hard work, perseverance, and rolling up your sleeves to get things done. Those lessons shaped who I am today and continue to guide how I lead and serve to manage teams, solve problems, listen, collaborate and deliver results especially when every dollar should directly benefit students and staff through wide, transparent and accountable spending.

My passion for community service encourages me because seeing young people pursue their goals reinforces why strong public schools matter.

I'm especially protective of children because they are our future. I believe we already have the talent, dedication, and know-how in Avery County. If we empower our teachers and staff, place the right people in the right roles, and use resources wisely, our schools can truly thrive giving us the work force and people to make Avery County thrive.

I'm all in - for our students, our educators, and Avery County.

## **2.**

As a professional, I manage teams responsible for solving complex problems and delivering measurable outcomes within budget. This experience has taught me that strong leadership is rooted in listening, collaboration, and follow-through. I have a results-driven mindset that emphasizes placing the right people in the right roles, setting clear expectations, and ensuring resources are aligned to real needs. These skills directly inform how I would approach board policy and budgeting decisions.

As a volunteer, I served as secretary of the Avery County Schools Education Foundation, helping award scholarships to local students which gave me insight into how strategic investments can change lives and reinforced the importance of stewardship over limited resources. Also, I actively support local youth through Dogtown, which keeps me connected to students, families, and the needs they face outside the classroom.

Both personally and professionally, I am deeply committed to fiscal responsibility and transparency. I have completed coursework through the UNC School of Government on public records law, open government, and school board/local government collaboration, as well as doing my own work reading NC statutes and speaking with

other school districts' resources. These experiences equip me to evaluate budgets carefully, ask informed questions, and advocate for spending that directly benefits students and teachers.

### **3.**

My number 1 priority is: We need a long-term plan.

Per NC DPI, Avery County taxpayers spend per student ~\$4,000. In Mitchell County, it is ~\$2,100 per student. In Watauga, they spend ~\$4,200 per student. Based on the grade comparisons, adding more money or increasing the school budget has not appeared to be the answer. As attendance rates are dropping and State and Federal funding is being reduced, I believe we need to analyze the existing data to see where we are and where we expect to be in 4 years, based on the needs of the community. Working with the staff in the school system as our "boots on the ground," this would include addressing:

- **Academic quality and Workforce readiness** – Boost reading and grading level performance to raise our grades and the kids learning; Increase opportunities for kids with internships, apprenticeships, community outreach for employment/experience.
- **Student and Staff Safety and Well-Being** – Creating a solid safety plan for each school, addressing natural disaster response by resilience planning and mental wellness support.
- **Resource Management** – Addressing staff retention, professional development to maintain continuity; Identify the maintenance plan for all school infrastructure, partnering with the Commission on future capital outlays; Technology integration to work for the staff to reduce administrative burdens

### **4.**

Avery County schools should be places where students receive a strong education while being fully prepared for life beyond graduation no matter their direction, whether that path leads to college, a skilled trade, military service, or the local workforce. To meet that vision, we need safe, supportive schools with stable leadership and empowered educators who have the resources and respect needed to do their jobs

well. Prioritizing student outcomes, the Board should work to maintain strong relationships with families, local businesses, and the broader community so schools reflect Avery County's values of hard work, integrity, and care for one another. Partnering with the community resources and the local governments, the goal is a sustainable, student-centered system that prepares every child for a productive, meaningful life, remaining accountable to the community it serves.

**5.**

To address teacher and bus driver staffing and retention challenges, the Board should first identify why the problem exists and what challenges the staff are facing. The Board needs to identify the root of the problem.

All staff received a 2% pay cut in 2025, was this the issue? Has there been an analysis on competitive compensation with similar school districts and if so, what does that look like? Does the school system currently have supportive working conditions and long-term workforce development? Is there consistent discipline and realistic schedules? Are the staff included in decisions that affect their work? Is there strong onboarding and ongoing professional development? Getting answers to these questions and learning from existing and previous staff would be the first step.

Taking care of the people who keep our schools running is essential to student success and the long-term strength of our school system as well as the community.

**6.**

In Avery County, we are fortunate to have dedicated teachers and staff who truly care about students, and there are areas where our students are performing well. At the same time, we need to be honest and acknowledge that overall academic outcomes show room for improvement, particularly when it comes to consistent proficiency levels and ensuring students graduate fully prepared for life after high school. Being transparent about where we are is not criticism for our educators, but it's the first step toward real progress. These are opportunities for success!

As a board member, my role would be to support, challenge, and partner with administrators and staff, not micromanage them, to identify what works for our kids (the same thing doesn't work for every child). Improvement starts with strong collaboration and I believe the Board must work with staff to clearly set expectations, use data responsibly, and ensure that administrators and educators have the tools, staffing, and resources they need to succeed in the classroom.

I believe Avery County has the talent and dedication already in house. By fostering trust, encouraging innovation, and focusing every decision on student success, the Board can work alongside administrators to raise academic performance and ensure

every student has the opportunity to thrive.

**7.**

To me, equity means meeting students where they are, not lowering expectations for some or limiting opportunities for others. In saying this, equity does not necessarily mean pulling

resources away from high-achieving schools. Those students deserve continued access to opportunities that challenge them and prepare them for college or careers. Strong schools should be encouraged to keep excelling.

The Board should learn from what is working in our schools, as well as other similar school districts, and share the information across the district. This includes partnering with the charter school. Collaboration, not competition, between schools helps raise overall performance in Avery County.

Avery County can both strengthen underperforming schools and continue to support high-performing, competitive programs if we are intentional and data-driven.

Resources should be tied to clear goals, progress monitoring, and accountability as we should see what works and what doesn't.

**8.**

We need to do everything we can for struggling students and students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Working with staff, I would see what the data reveals. From my understanding, when students begin to fall behind academically, behaviorally, or emotionally, support should be immediate and coordinated with the families, not delayed until problems escalate. This could include access to nutrition programs, transportation reliability, after-school tutoring, and family outreach. When families are supported, students are more likely to succeed.

Working with the community and parents, I would advocate for mentorship programs that connect students with trusted adults whether that be teachers, staff, trained volunteers, or community mentors. This can provide consistency, encouragement, and accountability. One caring relationship can make a lasting difference in a child's life.

I believe in high expectations paired with strong support. Advocacy does not mean lowering standards; it means giving students the tools to meet them. By empowering educators, coordinating resources wisely, and listening to student and family needs, we can ensure every child, regardless of background, has a real opportunity to thrive academically and personally.

**9.**

One advantage of using remote learning days is it can maintain instructional and learning continuity so our schools don't fall behind (or miss spring break or have school into the summer). Remote days can encourage students to build independent learning and technology skills that are becoming more important in their future. However, equitable access is a major concern since some students in Avery County have unreliable/no internet or electricity outages, which can unintentionally negatively impact their learning. Remote days may also be less effective for younger students, students with disabilities, or students who rely on in-person support, such as meals, counseling, or structured supervision. For working families, remote days can create childcare and supervision challenges as well.

The Board should work with staff and parents to see what works and what is not working to ensure family's needs and the student's educational needs and safety are being met.

**10.**

Standards of excellence and accountability must be clearly defined, fairly measured, and strongly supported. The goal is continuous improvement rooted in respect for the professionals doing the work every day. Teachers should have a voice in decisions that affect instruction and policy. When teachers feel supported, respected, and held to fair standards, excellence follows.

The Board should work with administrators and teachers to ensure clear, consistent expectations for teaching and learning across all schools, aligned with state standards but adaptable to Avery County's local needs. Accountability works best when expectations are understood and achievable.

Accountability requires stability, consistency, and follow-through so the Board must support administrators in addressing performance concerns respectfully and promptly while also recognizing and retaining strong teachers who contribute positively to school culture and values.

Strong schools are built by empowering educators, supporting growth, and maintaining accountability with integrity, always centered on what best serves Avery County students.

**11.**

Our community deserves real-time visibility into the decisions shaping our schools. Transparency builds trust, reduces misinformation, and encourages informed engagement.

That's why I support:

- Live-streaming Board meetings so parents, staff, and community members can hear discussions firsthand, even when they can't attend in person.
- Clear communication on policy changes, with handouts and explanations shared in advance, written in plain language.
- Finalizing agendas at least six days before meetings, allowing the public meaningful time to review items and prepare public comments.
- Creating a public data repository for records requests, saving staff time and increasing access to information.
- Strict adherence to policies and statutes, with clear documentation in meeting minutes to avoid confusion or perceived impropriety.
- Ensuring regularly scheduled and attended budget meetings with the County

Commissioners providing the status of Avery County taxpayer dollars spent •

Increase parents, family and community involvement as we are all team members to help make our students succeed

These ideas aren't new. I raised them with the Board in July 2024, and while I appreciate that Avery County Schools comply with "Harrison's Law," I don't believe it should take a law to do right by taxpayers.

Our schools thrive when the community is informed and involved. Let's make it easier for everyone to have a seat at the table, virtually and in person.

## **12.**

Balancing the budget starts with a simple principle: every dollar should directly support students while respecting teachers, families, and taxpayers. Fiscal responsibility and student success are not competing goals; they depend on each other.

We must be willing to evaluate spending critically. That includes reviewing programs that show limited return on investment, reducing redundancy, and being cautious with one-time purchases or technology that doesn't clearly improve instruction. Efficiency matters, especially in Avery County where we have limited resources.

Strong collaboration with county commissioners is also essential. The Board should plan long-term, avoid reactive budgeting, and advocate for sustainable funding rather than short-term fixes.

Balancing the budget isn't about cutting for the sake of cutting, it's about making smart, disciplined choices based on what is best for the child's education while creating a sustainable school system for our future.

**13.**

I believe the Board's role in curriculum is to set direction/policy and expectations, not to micromanage classrooms. The Board should ensure curriculum aligns with state standards, while reflecting community values and needs, and prepares students for life beyond school. We need to trust professional educators to handle instructional design and delivery. In other words, use what works, by looking at student performance data and teacher feedback.

Ultimately, the Board's responsibility is to ask the right questions, set clear goals, and ensure accountability, while respecting the expertise of educators, giving Avery County students the best chance to succeed.

**14.**

Every student and every staff member deserves to feel safe, valued, and supported at school. Every day. A positive, safe school climate isn't created by a single policy, but by consistent expectations, strong relationships, and accountability.

Working with students, staff, and families, I support clear, consistently enforced anti-bullying policies that focus on prevention, early intervention, and appropriate consequences. Mental health supports are essential, not optional. That means supporting our counselors, social workers, and partnerships with community providers so students have access to help during the school day, without stigma.

Promoting an inclusive environment requires teaching respect and personal responsibility as part of everyday learning through age-appropriate instruction and behavior expectations. Our school system, including the Board, sets the example. When students understand how to treat one another with dignity, schools become safer naturally.

Safety and respect thrive when schools are predictable, supportive, and focused on the whole child. By aligning policy, resources, and culture, Avery County Schools can foster environments where all students feel secure, included, and ready to learn.

**15.**

Everyone has experienced trauma coming out of Hurricane Helene, but being able to provide support capacity across our school district can help foster people in this

situation.

I would review and support the efforts currently underway in our school system and expand its reach. It is based on mental health partnerships in our community to provide services to staff and students/families with access to mental help, whether it be in school or in the community.

Avery County is a small community so relationships are important. The school counselors know the providers and community members. Working together, they can provide information and services more easily to take care of our kids and the staff. The Student Health Advisory council meets quarterly to discuss the needs and opportunities for mental wellness. I would love to be a part of this council/committee to see how I could help.

**16.**

Language learning should be a two-way opportunity. ESL is a State requirement where Latino and multilingual students can access the curriculum, feel supported, and succeed academically. Avery County Schools could expand opportunities for bilingual learning for all students by introducing or growing Spanish instruction at earlier grade levels, after-school language clubs, and elective courses that emphasize conversational skills, cultural understanding, and real-world use. Language learning benefits every student by improving communication, cognitive flexibility, and career readiness.

By viewing language diversity as a strength, Avery County Schools can better prepare students to engage respectfully with classmates, families, and the broader community for both now and in the future.

**17.**

Inclusivity, respect, and equity are built through daily practice, clear expectations, and intentional education, not slogans, for a well-rounded education. No matter their background, every student should feel valued, safe, and supported in Avery County Schools.

Honoring Avery County's local culture is essential. Our schools should continue to celebrate community traditions, local history, service, and values like hard work, integrity and responsibility. Students should graduate with pride in where they come from and respect for those who come from different backgrounds.

**18.**

(See response to Question 11) Engaging parents and community stakeholders in decision-making is essential to building trust, improving outcomes, and ensuring

schools reflect the values of Avery County of honesty and integrity.

Community input matters. That means explaining how input influenced decisions or why certain choices were made. Strong schools are built in partnership with the communities they serve. When parents and stakeholders are informed, heard, and respected, decision-making improves and trust grows.

**19.**

Concerns about being under-informed/unheard are a signal to improve communication, access, and trust, not something to dismiss/ignore. The Board has a responsibility to ensure the community knows what decisions are being considered, why they matter, and how people can meaningfully provide input.

I would reach out to those community members with the staff to see how this could be addressed. Feeling heard builds trust. By listening actively, communicating clearly, and being transparent about decisions, the Board can strengthen relationships with families and ensure Avery County Schools reflect the community they serve.

**20.**

Promoting accessibility during adverse winter weather requires flexibility, fairness, and safety-first planning, especially in a mountain county where road conditions vary widely.

Working with the staff and those impacted, we would find a solution that gives the students the best opportunity to succeed in their education, while keeping them safe, and providing a solution that is not burdensome to the families. By prioritizing safety, communication, and flexibility, Avery County Schools can ensure students are not left behind simply because of where they live or the weather they face.

**21.**

In my opinion, Avery County's most pressing education challenge right now is ensuring consistent, high-quality instruction for every student amid staffing changes and staff morale issues. When our staff suffers, so do the students.

Our teachers, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, janitors and support staff are the backbone of the school system. When staffing is unstable, it directly impacts student learning, school climate, and family confidence. At the same time, students are still recovering academically and emotionally from Hurricane Helene, along with their other personal hurdles/struggles.

The Board must stabilize the workforce by fostering a supportive, safe working environment for all staff with clear goals and accountability. Taking care of the people who serve students every day is not an option, it is essential.

**22.**

The Board should find and evaluate each opportunity and how it can help the child. If the need exists in the community, the Board should take advantage and provide them to the students to prepare them for life after high school.

**23.**

(See response to Question 3) The Board should be asking “why.” Why is enrollment trending down? Is there something the Board can do to increase enrollment? Proactive planning allows the district to adjust responsibly without sudden disruptions for families or staff.

Funding levels change when enrollment changes and Avery County’s enrollment is trending downward. Collaboration matters. The Board should work closely with administrators, county commissioners, and community partners to pursue grants and innovative solutions when enrollment or funding pressures arise.

Change is inevitable. With thoughtful leadership, transparent decision-making, and responsible planning, the Board can ensure Avery County Schools remain strong, adaptable, and focused on student success, no matter how conditions change.

**24.**

I define success for students in Avery County Schools as being educated, supported, and prepared for their chosen path in life whether that’s college, a skilled trade, military service, or the workforce while growing into respectful, capable citizens.

I cannot give you a specific metric or set of metrics to determine student success as while academic achievement matters, true success is broader than a metric.

Success, to me, is when Avery County students leave our schools confident, capable, and prepared to succeed in life.

**25.**

While I respect the service of current Board members, if elected, I would bring a stronger emphasis on transparency, proactive community engagement, and consistent follow-through/execution. Simply put, do the right thing for the best education for the students and the best our school system and staff.

**26.**

(See response to Question 12) Student-centered decision-making and respect for taxpayer interests must go hand in hand as they are not competing priorities. When resources are used wisely and transparently, students benefit and taxpayers gain confidence that their investment matters.

I will ensure decisions are built on this question: How does this directly benefit students? Investments should be tied to measurable outcomes such as academic growth, safety, attendance, graduation readiness, and student well-being. If an initiative cannot demonstrate value to students, it deserves another look to find a better solution.

Being student-centered means making thoughtful, informed decisions that produce real results while being good stewards of the hard-earned dollars of the families and taxpayers who make public education possible in Avery County.