

Questions for school board candidates (Republican Party)

1. What is your history with the school system/school board? Former student? Teacher/staff member? Parent of current or former student?

I am a former student as well as the parent of a student who graduated with the Class of 2020 and my other son is currently a junior at WHS. I therefore bring a critical perspective. As a former educator (I taught Freshman English and Public Speaking @ Tuskegee University), I have certain expectations for the skills that high school students should grasp and master. With bachelors' and master's degrees in Journalism and communications and being a professional communicator/writer for much of my career, I understand the quality demands of the marketplace. Additionally, I have held varying levels of professional management positions with nonprofits and worked with middle/high school students from that perspective. I have a rich family history with education in the community (which gives me great pride as it's a part of my legacy that I hope to pass on to my own children,) the church and throughout the county. Both my husband and I have volunteered in the public schools. I helped form the Coastal Montessori Charter School, which is a part of the public school system. I have therefore already served on a school board, undergoing state training for such, participated in multiple board retreats, and helped propose a new school to the GCSD. I understand the intricate details of schools from the inside, as a parent, as a nonprofit leader, as a communicator, and as a person of faith.

2. Are you familiar with the curriculum at each level? If so, what will you do to improve student progress and performance, graduation rate, college/career readiness? Does the curriculum address the technological needs for students to survive in a constantly changing world?

Yes, I am familiar with the curriculum. Student performance is extremely important to me, which is why I supported the Montessori Charter School – not all children learn the same, yet standards need to be met. I believe in challenging curriculum with diversified learning environments and techniques. The curriculum was just revised in the 2015-16 school years after the state rejected the common core. While the common core had some merits, it did not identify differences among states, counties, communities, or children. Our new SC curriculum reflects our state's desire to achieve high standards but gives our local districts authority to adapt curriculum. For example, GCSD was able to respond to this pandemic by forming a plan based on our county's makeup and needs.

According to the most recent Kids Count Data (2019) SC Child Well-Being Data Profile, we have much work to do. For the year 2017, 58.3% of third graders in our county tested below state standards in ELA; and almost 70% of eighth graders tested below state standards in math in 2017. Student progress in 3rd grade reading and math and 8th grade reading and math absolutely need to be improved. Our graduation rates and dropout rates have improved, thanks to new efforts at the middle school and high school levels for career and college readiness, but we need to do more. We need to develop a path to success for each student, regardless of whether they seek a postsecondary education or proceed directly to work.

We need to provide vocational options and start collaborating more with HGTC and universities, such as Coastal Carolina University. We need to review and make more challenging the options for college prep and college credit courses and seek out opportunities such as Horry County's scholars academy, providing a diversity of options for different student needs and career/college paths, but not neglecting high achievement or advanced trades. We must educate to elevate ALL students regardless of background or future intentions.

Additionally, I believe we need a combination of competitive education and apprenticeship/internships for our students. Regarding competitive education, GCSB must look outside of the state to other successful schools and school districts. I'd love for our schools to be the best of the best, not the best of the worst nationally. For example, there's an excellent school in the south Bronx, NY that has made tremendous strides. I would love to see our educators examine that and other successful models across the country.

In fact, speaking of trades, the 21st Century and technology are linked to such trades. Our new light industrial manufacturing facility makes that investment and link clear. Again, we need to train ALL students – college bound or not – in 21st Century skills that unite all careers under the umbrella of innovation. Our community is no stranger to disasters – and not just pandemics – which has proven our need to be resilient. Technology in the classroom gives us that edge.

3. Teachers and students are, for the most part, still dependent on textbooks whether in hard copy or online. How and by whom are district textbooks selected? Teachers? Supervisors? Parents? How often are textbooks for each discipline adopted?

Yes, textbooks need to be offered in paper and online because some students still need/prefer/require textbooks. The State conforms a textbook adoption committee to select texts based on best practices and standards. The textbook companies provide alignment guidelines to the standards. Teachers pilot the materials and select based on standards and innovation, namely, ancillary materials that provide different ways of learning for ALL students. Obviously, digital textbooks during crises are increasingly critical. Textbooks are adopted every five years.

4. Other than attending school board meetings, how active will you be in the education process? Attend school functions? Will you tour schools in order to detect facility needs? Talk with teachers? Students? Parents?

Yes, absolutely! To effectively participate in school board meetings, it will be essential for me to not only attend school functions, but to regularly visit the schools and converse with staff and students to better understand their needs and interests. I welcome the opportunity to not just tour the schools to assess facility needs but to get a feel for the culture of each school. Talking on a regular basis with teachers, students and parents should be a natural part of the "job description" of a school board member. I will also seek additional ways to be assessable to my constituents, such as hosting community meetings (virtual, for now; in person when circumstances finally warrant). Additionally, I would like to research and learn about what other successful school districts/boards are doing in the spirit of continuous improvement.

5. Other than COVID-19, what is the most important issue facing our district and how will you address it?

I can list several but will focus on just a few: Student performance – pre and post CoVid. We cannot afford to be a state that ranks at the bottom. Many new people have moved to our county during the pandemic and we have an opportunity to grow our economic base. We need to create high performing schools so new companies will have employees to hire. Competitive schools with high performance – in both vocational and academic fields – attract high performing businesses. We have a responsibility to do better. I would work with district staff and officials as a board member to bring key players to the table to ensure we have every resource in place to accomplish these goals.

Also, the District must consider ways to improve school programs/career development through curriculum. I alluded to this earlier. We must improve upon our career development programs to reflect the challenges of today and tomorrow. We have several key businesses/industries in Georgetown County where we can strengthen existing ties, as I understand progress has been made in this arena, but more needs to be done and quickly, so that more of our young people can take advantage of all that is available. Also, such programs need to be made available at all of the high schools as opposed to having students travel from one high school to the next. Our efforts to create pathways to success for every student must be a top priority. Finally, we must examine teacher salaries. Do we pay competitive wages to get the best teachers/principals or do we lose our best teachers to Horry County? Do we have too many administrative staff and not enough educational resources for our students? As a new board member, I would follow the money. Why am I mentioning it here? Because it is critical for us to invest in our education if we want Georgetown County to flourish economically.

6. What is your understanding of school Choice and do you support it?

School choice involves the parents determining what is the best educational environment for their children based on the needs and interests of their children. Public funding follows the student to whatever school they attend – be it public, private, charter school, homeschool or any other learning environment conducive to academic success. I wholeheartedly support it, as evidenced by my involvement as a founding board member of the Coastal Montessori Charter School, a public school that is a vital part of the Georgetown County School District and where my two boys attended for a few years. School choice for ALL works best by providing diversified quality education in a public school system.

7. What is your understanding of School Funding?

Schools are funded by a combination of federal dollars, which support special education/services, career/technology, etc. and state and local dollars. The state provides a base cost for students per year, which is critical when setting the budget. Local taxes are used for capital projects, building upkeep, maintenance, purchasing and technology upgrades. As a school board member, I want to be knowledgeable and understand how and why the funds are being allocated. This is part of my fiscal responsibility as a board member.

8. Would you support teaching the Constitution? Why or Why not

Absolutely!! It's actually a state law to teach the Constitutions and we live in a leading constitutional democracy. Democracy is kept and revered through teaching the rights and liberties that we all have. In fact, many argue that we need to teach more about our governance system, not less, to promote a vibrant democracy. The more our young people know and understand the history of this country, how the country is run, and the role of government, including the state and local levels, along with their (students') role and rights, they can take a vested interest and prepare for leadership as they seek to make their way in this world.