

Focusing On The Big Picture

Interviews with the City Council and School Board Candidates in
RVA



The Richmond Times Dispatch has published a series of interviews with the candidates in each district who are running for City Council or the School Board. This is a snapshot of those interviews that answers our key question: **Is It Good For Kids?**

City Council

The 1st District

The Big Issue: Name one way you plan to improve city schools.

Andreas Addison: I will pursue full funding from every federal and state source available. I will meet monthly with School Board members to outline the funding needs of our schools. I will visit schools monthly to speak with leadership, teachers, parents and students to make sure we are achieving our outcomes.

Jonathan Cruise: I will commit to constantly collaborating with and working alongside families, the School Board, and the Mayor's Office to ensure that schools obtain the resources and financial support they need to help children in Richmond succeed.

The 28 City Council Candidates were asked the following:

What prior government/civic experience do you have?

What do you believe is the biggest difference between you and your opponents?

Name one way you plan to improve city schools.

Name one way you plan to improve delivery of a basic city service.

Describe an ordinance or resolution you hope to pass in your first term on the council.

Outside of citywide concerns about schools and basic services, what is the biggest issue facing your district? How do you hope to address it?

What initiatives/actions of the current mayor and City Council do you support?

What initiatives/actions of the current mayor and City Council do you oppose?

Do you support any of the candidates for mayor?

Do you oppose any of the candidates for mayor?

Harry Warner: I will work with the School Board to make the school system competitive by increasing the educational programs and opportunities. That is achieved by increasing the commonwealth's share of the Composite Index to pre-recession levels and rightsizing the system's facilities to match the student body.

The 2nd District

The Big Question: What do you believe is the biggest difference between you and your opponents?

Charlie Diradour: My work over the years has been inclusive, allowing all voices to be heard. Ms. Gray's tenure has been marked by discord between the School Board, Council, and the Mayor. While I admire Ms. Keel's passion for service, experience is critical in order to fix the problems of the city.

Kim Gray: I've spent my adult life in public service. This uniquely positions me to understand the needs of myriad constituencies and to serve as a bridge and unifier of cultures and communities. — Also, I'm a mother of current students of RPS, which increases my understanding of Richmond's challenges.

Rebecca Keel: Three things: I have the ability to do this job at a full-time capacity (40+ hours/week). I am a community organizer, so have the know how of how to effectively connect with and mobilize folks. I am a social worker.

The 3rd District

The Big Question: What initiatives/actions of the current mayor and City Council do you support?

Milondra **Coleman:** I support Mayor Jones' participation in the 'We Stand Together' forum on recent violence. Regarding City Council, I support the fact that some council members, i.e. Jon Baliles, are proposing ideas to "create a minimum stable level of funding" for public education.

Dorian **Daniels:** I like that the Mayor is trying to upgrade the city and put us in a position to be competitive with other up and coming cities. As the next councilman, I will work with the next Mayor to keep pushing the City of Richmond forwards a more 21st Century city.

Hassan **Fountain:** I support that it is election time and our current mayor and a few City Council will be out to make way for the LEADERS OF THE NEW SCHOOL!!

Chris **Hilbert:** The Office of Community Wealth Building is a vehicle that focuses our efforts to reduce poverty in our city. The creation of mixed income communities will also help our city to address poverty. The isolation of poorer residents has reduced their opportunity to share in the city's growth.

The 4th District

The Big Issue: Describe an ordinance or resolution you hope to pass in your first term on the council.

Tim Grimes: After working with the CAO, I will introduce an ordinance for scheduled bulk/brush pick-up.

Kristen Larson: Dedicated funding for Richmond Public Schools is a priority for me in my first term. Setting aside a portion of the budget for education would allow RPS to make long-term plans and invest in facilities improvements. I am hopeful this would also end the annual budget battle.

Larry Olanrewaju: If not done before January, I will introduce an ordinance that will establish a stable, predictable funding formula for annual, operating and capital improvement budgets for city schools. Doing so increases the efficiency of the budget planning process for both the Mayor and the Superintendent.

Jeff Thomas: Elections should be about helping your community, not soliciting handouts. I have not accepted any donations, and I think that taking money from corporations, unions or people who live outside of Richmond should be illegal. My first bill will prohibit this thinly-veiled political corruption.

Johnny Walker: I plan to develop and pass legislation that will provide for a dedicated funding source for RPS. This will ensure that RPS can properly plan and budget for future improvements to schools, i.e., infrastructure, curriculum enhancements and teacher salaries. Funding will be tied to academic results.

The 5th District

The Big Question: Name one way you plan to improve city schools.

Parker Agelasto: While I continue to work for schools to receive additional resources, I also think we need to improve communication and formalize that process. I would like to see a regular monthly meeting between City Council, School Board and the mayor to work collaboratively and establish shared priorities.

Montigue Magruder: I will seek a legal challenge to the state's Local Composite Index and misuse of Virginia Lottery funds intended to boost the state's funding for schools.

Garrett Sawyer: Collect outstanding property taxes and develop five- to ten-year funding plan to address funding needs. School supply budgets have been cut to almost nothing; therefore, teachers are left to spend hundreds of dollars every year on basic classroom supplies. We must do better.

The 6th District

The Big Question: What initiatives/actions of the current mayor and City Council do you support?

Donald Moss: The current mayor, and City Council, have done little over the past year. I did support the 2013 anti-LGBT workplace discrimination ordinance and Council President Mosby's "Ban the Box" initiative to prevent discrimination against those who have previously fell afoul of the law.

Ellen Robertson: Affordable housing trust fund, Master Plan, CWB –Poverty reduction Dept., New schools, Increased police/fire/teachers pay, Community re-investment, and new jobs.

The 7th District

The Big Issue: Describe an ordinance or resolution you hope to pass in your first term on the council.

Cynthia Newbille: An ordinance which identifies and codifies dedicated funding sources, strategies and/or funding formulas for the annual City funding allocation to Richmond Public Schools.

Josh Williams: I will seek to present and sponsor actions that will provide and support a true opportunity to decreasing poverty. It will focus on sponsoring people who are unable to gain employment due to a lack of transportation or driver's licenses, education and many other factors.

The 8th District

The Big Issue: Name one way you plan to improve city schools.

Amelia Lightner: Several proposals have been offered by Councilman Baliles, that merit review and discussion as it relates to funding to Richmond Public Schools.

Reva Trammell: To fully fund their request to the extent possible.

The 9th District

The Big Issue: Name one way you plan to improve city schools.

Leon Benjamin: We plan to either repair or build new city schools in the 9th District.

Michael Jones: By prioritizing the budget needs, and doing a better job holding city government and the school administration accountable for school academic achievement, building maintenance and tax dollars given each year. Accountability must become our top priority for all government officials in Richmond.

Germika Pegram: One plan to improve city schools is develop a curriculum based improvement program and parental empowerment centers. This would assist to create lower family literacy rates and build towards community extension that would continue to give the exchange between entities and schools to partner.

Marcus Squires: Good public schools build a stronger and better workforce, help attract and retain quality employers, increase property values, and enhance the quality of life. In order to continue to compete in our expanding economy I will work with our school board to bring more support into the public schools.

School Board Candidates

The 1st District

The Big Question: While RPS faces a slew of issues and problems, name something positive being done in the district or at a school and how it can be duplicated elsewhere in the district?

Dawson Boyer: Successful schools all have one thing in common and that is community involvement and volunteerism. RPS has seen a surge of support from parents, neighborhoods, local businesses and non-profits. People are getting involved and that is inspiring to the students, teachers and City.

Liz Doerr: Community leaders are taking action in their neighborhoods to educate young professionals and families on the benefits of enrolling their children in RPS. Some neighborhood associations are even creating school liaison positions to encourage higher enrollment.

The 2nd District

The Big Question: Given the budget realities facing RPS, where can the district make cuts that save money without affecting academics?

Mariah White: Dr. Bedden, administrative staff, which consist of 86 employees.

Scott Barlow: We can streamline costs of RPS operations by reducing the costs of hiring new teachers through improved teacher retention efforts and by fully implementing the adopted capital improvement plan. We need to invest as much of our schools' budget as possible directly into classroom instruction.

The 3rd District

The Big Question: The number of schools gaining full accreditation and the on-time graduations rate are both down. What needs to be done to turn those around and do you support RPS's current School Progress Plan?

Jessee Perry: The School Progress Plan is positive since it seeks to address root causes; however, we need to ensure the content is not more of the same answers and will drive change by engaging all stakeholders (e.g. Council, Mayor, etc). We need to stop removing funding as soon as a school hits a benchmark.

Jeff Bourne: The most effective tool to increase student success is having quality teachers and principals in each of our schools. We must continue to attract/retain the best.

Kevin Starlings: We have to dig deeper. An increasing number of our kids are coming into the classroom with past or current trauma which distracts their minds and dictates their behaviors. We have to gain control of this as it has a large affect on their academic performance. This isn't a part of that plan.

The 4th District

The Big Question: What is your opinion of Superintendent Dana Bedden's tenure, and do you intend to support him if elected?

Barrett Hardiman: Dr. Bedden has presented strong facilities and academic plans for our school system that include strong metrics and accountability. The school board should judge his performance based on his ability to deliver on those plans. It is important for us to be partners, not barriers, in that effort.

Sean Smith: I cannot say I fully support Dr. Bedden, but would permit him time under a new board to make improvements. If agreed upon goals are not met, I would proceed with asking for his resignation.

Irvine Reaves: I believe Dr. Bedden deserves an opportunity to succeed. I know that the existing inefficiencies in RPS will not change in a year but I intend to support Dr. Bedden, the principals, teachers, families and students through that transition.

Jonathan Young: I have conversed with scores of teachers who are not supportive of Bedden because he never addresses the chronic problem of teacher turnover and that administrators micromanage teachers forcing them to teach from the same curriculum, same lesson plans, teaching to the test. I will vote to remove Bedden because I prioritize teachers.

The 5th District

The Big Question: While RPS faces a slew of issues and problems, name something positive being done in the district or at a school and how it can be duplicated elsewhere in the district?

Mamie Taylor: There are many great things occurring in the district; to include the wonderful reading program at Swansboro, engaging students during lunch, the integrated arts program at Binford, the high principal visibility at George Wythe, strong PTA at Cary, Maymont's creativity, and Open's style of family.

Patrick Sapini: Expansion of the Pre K program to an all inclusive program so that all children that are of age can be enrolled without restriction would benefit the district.

The Candidates were asked the following questions:

What is your opinion of Superintendent Dana Bedden's tenure and do you intend to support him if elected?

What is a School Board member's role in the day-to-day administration of RPS?

Will you support closing schools if the administration recommends that it will be best in the long term? Why or why not?

One issue you may face early on is redistricting. When it comes to moving school lines, what should the priorities be?

Given the budget realities facing RPS, where can the district make cuts that save money without affecting academics?

Attracting and retaining teachers is seen as key to turning RPS around. What will you say to current and prospective teachers thinking about going elsewhere about why they should stay?

While RPS faces a slew of issues and problems, name something positive being done in the district or at a school and how it can be duplicated elsewhere in the district?

What needs to be done to turn schools that are not accredited around and do you support RPS's current School Progress Plan?

The 6th District

The Big Question: The number of schools gaining full accreditation and the on-time graduations rate are both down. What needs to be done to turn those around and do you support RPS's current School Progress Plan?

Shonda Harris-Muhammed: We need committed people to make an investment to plant their feet in RPS. Research shows that there is no continuity in a school, when there is high turnover of teachers and administrators in any school, that will impact student achievement and the climate.

Felicia Cosby: RPS' culture needs to promote excellence, support innovation, and encourage collaboration. A more robust plan is needed to include performance-based incentives encouraging classroom excellence; trauma-based practices; and more career/technical opportunities for additional pathways to success.

The 7th District

The Big Question: Will you support closing schools if the administration recommends that it will be best in the long term? Why or why not?

Kirsten Gray: I will not support two high poverty schools consolidated into one dilapidated building. Nor will I support consolidation to the point of overcrowding like with Elkhartd-Thompson. I will support a more efficient district including school closures but not to the educational detriment of the poor.

Nadine Marsh-Carter: Educational best practices advocate for smaller class sizes, especially in schools that serve at-risk populations. So I would only support closings that would not create more overcrowded classrooms and if a compelling, strategic and non-discriminatory case is made for why specific schools are closed.

The 8th District

The Big Question: School administrators have said that a possible solution to dealing with some fiscal issues facing RPS and to create a more efficient district is to close some schools. Will you support closing schools if the administration recommends that it will be best in the long term? Why or why not?

Tia Redd: The business of schools is to educate students. Instead of consolidating and downsizing we need to be trying to figure out why enrollment is dropping and put more effort into retaining and drawing in students and improving overall educational equity and quality.

Dawn Page: Equitable resource allocation to support all RPS children must be the hallmark when considering school closures. I would support rationally designed school closures if biases are put aside and obstacles evenhandedly addressed. The process must be mindful, transparent, well-reviewed and fair.

The 9th District

The Big Question: While RPS faces a slew of issues and problems, name something positive being done in the district or at a school and how it can be duplicated elsewhere in the district?

Linda Baker Owen : In many schools, students feel welcomed and important and close to their teachers. In some, there is less nurturing and more negative energy. Train, mentor, monitor.

Local Elections count!

Check out additional resources to get informed before November 8th!

Full Interviews with the Candidates: <http://www.richmond.com/news/election-coverage/>

#IsItGood4Kids Facebook Group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/177786722911243/>