

St, Tammany School Board District 15

Melissa Burton Amato	Independent
Michelle Ruffino Gallaher	Republican
Glen Harris	Independent

No Responses to our questions

Questions and Answers:

- 1) What experience in your background prepares you to effectively ensure transparency and accountability as a school board member in setting and achieving sound educational goals?**

Melissa Burton Amato

Ensuring transparency and accountability are necessary within any goal, especially Education. The experience that I will best utilize that ensures transparency and accountability as a school board member in setting and achieving sound educational goals is evident in my child's education and the completion of my Master of Business Administration program from LSU. My daughter learns differently than most and requires more of a hands-on approach to excel at learning. My daughter's educational goals were not being met in a traditionally brick and mortar setting so I found a way to make that happen by educating her virtually. My determination to ensure a more customized education for my daughter prepared me to help ensure that others will set and achieve sound educational goals. In 2020, I graduated LSU with an MBA and a 3.8 GPA. This educational experience required transparency and accountability to achieve it. This goal required determination and integrity as I completed my MBA in a remote environment in the peak of Covid. Through this experience, I will apply the same dedication and responsibility to educational goals for the constituents of District 15 in St. Tammany Parish.

Michelle Ruffino Gallaher

No response

Glen Harris

Transparency and accountability are the foundation for the public trust in our school system. Therefore, it is imperative that the school board operates in an environment of transparency and hold all levels of the St. Tammany School Parish School System accountable to our children, our educators and to our parents. During my professional background, I have worked with budgets in excess of hundreds of millions of dollars that required that I understood revenue and expenses and I was held accountable for the distributions of these funds. In addition, working as an executive for two highly regulated industries, BellSouth (Public Service Commission) and State Farm Insurance (Louisiana Department of Insurance), I have had the opportunity over the past 25 years to operate in an environment that required high degrees of both transparency and accountability. Furthermore, I am a businessowner whose business is built on customer confidence in my ability to deliver results. Those skills and experiences will transition and serve me well as a school board member.

- 2) Despite pay raises and the new certification program, the significant teacher shortage in St. Tammany schools continues. Until the vacancies are filled with qualified teachers, what measures will you take to staff classes and ensure all students receive the highest quality of education?**

Melissa Burton Amato

Across the parish, we do have a significant teacher shortage. In July 2022, there were nearly 100 vacancies in St. Tammany Parish schools (1). The measures that I would execute so that students receive the highest quality of education with qualified individuals would be to utilize those individuals that are currently in supportive/administrative roles and encourage over-qualified substitute teachers from our communities. Each school has their own challenges. Rotating individuals into the classrooms that are currently in more supportive and/or administrative roles would help in two ways. The first way would be

to help educate our students. These individuals in supportive/administrative roles have most likely been teachers previously and so this experience would be tremendously helpful for our students. The second way is that the administrators would be able to receive a firsthand account of what the teachers experience on a daily basis. This experience would help the administrator become an even stronger administrator within our system. Retired individuals in business, finance and of course education would be a great resource for our school system as substitutes. These individuals would follow the same protocols as our current substitutes such as background checks and such. These individuals would bring a different level of experience and education to the classroom.

(1) https://www.nola.com/news/education/article_1193e6ac-0466-11ed-81ae_c36fa8c93b39.html

Michelle Ruffino Gallaher

No response

Glen Harris

Every student deserves the opportunity to be educated by a qualified teacher. Unfortunately, for any number of reasons our schools are experiencing vacancies in the classroom. Until those vacancies are filled, I am advocating that we become creative in filling those vacancies. For example, we can utilize retired teachers in a virtual environment to help staff some classes. Provide additional compensation (to be taken from the shortage of teachers' salaries) for the teacher who elects to use his/her planning periods to teach additional classes. Explore options such as using administrators and central office personnel to help in the classrooms. This issue will not be solved overnight, and we will have to be intentional, creative and open to embracing change to ensure that our children receive the very best education in the current environment.

- 3) **St. Tammany teachers reportedly consider that the administration does not support them and that they are being asked to do more daily tasks than they can handle with their teaching responsibilities. How will you address the perception that teachers lack the support they need?**

Melissa Burton Amato

The most optimum way for teachers, administration, and the school board to exist in harmony is with an open line of communication. In general, people get frustrated by not just an event happening but also by not being heard or understood. It is important to tackle perceptions while also setting realistic expectations of our administrators and teachers. Keeping an open mind, an open line of communication and a willingness to compromise will allow teachers to feel heard, understood and valued.

Michelle Ruffino Gallaher

No response

Glen Harris

As a result of my wife being a teacher for over 20 years in the St. Tammany Parish School System, I am afforded a unique perspective on the teacher's perceptions. In addition, I, along with others on the St. Tammany Parish School District Diversity and Inclusion committee, formed an employee survey that captured the teachers concerns, such as feeling overwhelmed, lack of support and underappreciated. The first thing that needs to occur is that we provide teachers with a safe forum to express their concerns. Secondly, we need to involve the teachers in being part of the solutions. The desired result is for administrators and teachers to collaborate and open the lines of honest and productive communication. Finally, provide administrators with professional development to help to better facilitate dialogue and to identify employee concerns. I believe that these steps will help mitigate the perceptions that teachers now hold regarding the lack of support.

- 4) **Many of the schools in St Tammany were built with a design in which open corridors connect adjacent wings of the buildings. Considering this building design could expose children to threats from outside the school campus, what will you do to address the critical problem of ensuring**

school safety now and permanent changes for the future? How do you propose paying for the changes or measures you identify as a necessary solution to school safety?

Melissa Burton Amato

Everything cost something. Adding more school resource officers would costs more money so would building physical barriers. School Resource Officers are some of our most valued members of the school district, but they cannot be everywhere at all times. Advances in technology allow for less expensive technological options that are less physically intrusive. Increased risks in these changing and challenging times are important to consider. Developing physical barriers surrounding and within our schools can be costly and possibly dangerous in case of a fire. I would encourage video cameras to be installed especially in high-risk areas of the school. Now, how would we pay for those video cameras and the monitoring of such cameras? According to the 2021-2022 budget, the utilities expenses equal \$8,053,540. Installing solar panels would significantly reduce the cost of utilities thus creating room in the budget for the purchase, installation, and monitoring of these video cameras.

Michelle Ruffino Gallaher

No response

Glen Harris

As a parent and a husband of an educator, school safety and security is a significant concern of mine. Therefore, protecting our children and our educators is a priority. I think that we should limit access to our campuses, invest in additional resource officers and provide more access to mental health care for our students. In addition, the use of technology is a cost-effective mean to help with security. The use of video cameras in high traffic areas, possible surveillance drones at large gatherings like football games is a way to increase security at our schools and to protect our children. Encourage parent/teacher conferences, whenever possible, to be done virtually. We will need to scrutinize the budget and make some difficult decisions as it relates to making school safety a priority. Obviously, this will mean that another area of the budget will be compromised. However, I would be willing to make that sacrifice to improve school safety.