

St. Tammany School Board District 4

Matthew L. Allen	No Party
Kalinda Fauntleroy	Republican
Matthew J. Garver	Republican

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?**

Matthew L. Allen

I believe my record speaks for itself in terms of experience needed to be an effective School Board Member. I retired as a Highly Effective teacher from St. Tammany Parish Schools in 2020 with a total of 22 years of experience, 20 in the St. Tammany Parish School System. I have experienced the decline of public education in the last 15 years and understand many of the issues leading to the decline. As a professional educator, I was the lead teacher for the adoption of the Next Generation Science Standards for Mandeville High (there were parts of the NGSS I did not agree with). I feel that the School System has lost sight of its mandate to educate the children and instead focuses on its own appearances which leads to a lack of transparency. I have experience creating math and science curriculum and have a firm understanding of developmentally appropriate goals.

I also have experience in the public arena as an advocate for better development practices relating to rivers and floodplains, pushing for better government accountability in St. Tammany Parish. I have sat on 2 committees concerning flood and drainage regulations for St. Tammany Parish Government and have shown I am a force for change and transparency. I have been told my efforts on environmental issues in Louisiana have improved the requirements and enforcement by state agencies for environmental permits relating to pollutant discharges into our waterways.

Kalinda Fauntleroy

Transparency: As an administrator for 18 years, it was necessary that I communicate effectively with all of my stakeholders (parents, teachers, community members, students). Effective communication requires sharing appropriate information and thinking through the questions and potential outcomes and possible misunderstandings prior to sharing the information. I believe that being transparent eliminates and prevents a multitude of problems. My plan would be to rename my candidate Facebook page to a representative page and post a synopsis of what transpired at each meeting as well as any other information that the community needs to be aware of in the world of education.

Accountability: 27 years in education (teacher, counselor, RHT, administrator) and as importantly 3 children who attended in STPPS from Kindergarten - 12th grade, has allowed me the opportunity to become well versed in all areas of which the School Board has oversight. Additionally, I have post graduate certification in Curriculum and District level Supervision and many years of experience with in school level and federal budgets. All of this combined, gives me insight into the day to day operation of the school district and personal knowledge of where I can find the answers when my constituents have questions or concerns.

Matthew J. Garver

I have practiced law in St. Tammany and Washington Parishes for over 15 years. As part of my practice, I have been advisory counsel to a school board and I have first hand experience with the operation of a school board. As a public entity, transparency is paramount. As a result, it is important to me that my constituents have a voice and a window into the process. I plan to be accessible to those in the district to listen to their concerns and address them with the board. Additionally, objective metrics are important to measure success. A superintendent scorecard could be implemented to measure key indicators to ensure the system is meeting goals

- 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?

Matthew L. Allen

I believe some of the restrictions and requirements for Certified, long-term substitutes should be relaxed. I also believe that the Administration should take part in teaching classes where a certified teacher is not available. I do not believe that long term positions should be filled by non-certified personnel.

Kalinda Fauntleroy

While pay raises are a start, improving the working conditions will be key to solving the teacher . Teachers must be treated with the respect they deserve and be treated as the professionals they are. Until the shortage is eliminated, one possible solution would be to pair qualified teachers with substitute teachers and pay them a stipend for working with the substitute to prepare and implement quality lessons. Keeping class sizes small will be key to maintaining a quality learning environment. The district has also partnered with an outside employment service firm to help fill vacancies.

Matthew J. Garver

The district has to do a better job to recruit and subsequently retain the best teachers in the state. I personally have a child that was taught last year by an individual who was not a certified teacher and, in fact, was still in school herself. As a result, I believe my child's LEAP scores suffered as a result. To bridge the gap on a temporary basis, I believe our best bet is to leverage retired teachers. I am in favor of providing temporary incentives for these retired educators to help on an ad hoc basis (and allowing the teachers to benefit without reduction in retirement benefits). The alternative of allowing inexperienced and/or less than qualified individuals in the classroom is not a good option in my opinion. It takes more than a heartbeat to be an effective teacher. I am not impressed with the iTeach program to address the immediate need. This program may have long term success if the candidates are properly supervised and/or if an apprenticeship program is developed. Rushing individuals into the classroom without proper preparation does not benefit the children.

- 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?

Matthew L. Allen

I felt the same way as a teacher and lack of support was one of the reasons for my retirement. The School Board has lost its mandate to support the teachers and students and instead focuses on its own appearance, to the detriment of the educational process. I will welcome input from the teachers in the classroom and other stakeholders. I promise to be respectful at all times to those who appear to speak at school board meetings. Another possible solution would be to start taking away antiquated mandates and responsibilities when teachers are asked to do more. I would also like to direct more resources into the classroom budgets for supplies instead of requiring teachers to purchase supplies.

Kalinda Fauntleroy

My experience as an educator reinforces what the teachers are reporting and it just seems to get worse every year. One item that I feel needs to be scrutinized is the way professional development is being handled. Professional development (PD) needs to be implemented in a manner that the TEACHERS report is beneficial. Often PLC (PD during the school day) is not a worthwhile use of the teachers time and creates a lose of instructional time for students. Teachers also tend to receive PD presented by fellow teachers better than outside trainers. PLC often requires countless hours of recording data just for the sake of paperwork. Teachers can tell you what a student needs from observation and interaction with the child. They do not need non-stop testing and data entry to reach these conclusions. These are a few of the things that could be taken off of the teachers plate.

Matthew J. Garver

In my opinion, teacher time is best spent in the classroom engaged in active instruction. Many of our policies and procedures appear to be form over function. We should encourage administration to embrace electronic data transmission where possible, and discourage duplication of effort with printed materials (ex- support Google classroom). Administration should be tasked with making administrative requirements as consistent and straightforward as possible. Further, disciplinary issues also cause a perception of inequality, as the teachers are tasked with meticulously documenting disruptive behaviors before action can be taken. The documentation process is tedious and adds additional work to the teacher's plates. Getting administration more involved in this process and providing additional support or help (i.e. involving administration in parent contact) would certainly help the perception from the teacher's standpoint and also likely get results as parents are more apt to respond timely to administration.

- 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?**

Matthew L. Allen

This question is one of the most difficult me to answer. I truthfully do not know enough, but would like to have a safety specialist advise the School Board on the best way to achieve optimum safety without having the students feel as though they are in prison behind wire and fences. There have been advances in the last few years such as outside doors keyed to student's I.D.s, limiting access through campus with gates and fewer entrances, and better training for the Safety Officers on campus. I do believe that solid fencing around the school would improve the safety of students in the open corridor designs. Avenues to fund any program would most likely be from Grants and Bonds.

Kalinda Fauntleroy

I was the principal at a school where the first building (which is still in use) was built in the 1940's. Since they have added 8 new buildings as the school grew. The district has made great strides through the addition of SRO's and key card access which allows all out buildings to remain locked. New buildings are designed with single point of entry designs and that trend should continue. Every year we add more cameras on each site and they can all be monitored at a central location on site as well as the district office. Some of this is funded in the general fund, some is from a safety grant the district was awarded and some was from a past bond issue.

One thing that we could do more of that really would not cost much is to do more training with students on making anonymous Crimestoppers tips. One possibility would be to add the phone number to the back of student Id's. As a principal, I know the students know about what is going on with their peers via social media, and in almost every situation another child is aware of potential threats. If they had easy access to the phone number (maybe even allow them to all take out their phone in the training assembly and program it in) they could make reports quickly so that the SRO and administration could work with law enforcement to address. Our district has a liaison with Crimestoppers who can contact all necessary personnel at any time of day. (I know because he called me at 3 am and I was able to contact the parent immediately to prevent a self - injurious situation. The report was made by another student who had seen a snapchat post and told her mother).

Unfortunately, as we see over and over, there is no 100% fool-proof way to stop a person intent on doing harm. I think we should do all we can to protect our physical school plant but I believe we need to continue to focus more on the mental health of our students and building systems of reporting and identifying students who are in crisis as an added layer of protection. Full-time Mental Health Providers in all schools is a much needed component.

Matthew J. Garver

We need to continue the partnership with the St. Tammany Parish Sheriff's office to keep resource officers in our schools. I believe that in this day and age, a qualified resource officer in every school is critical. In addition, I will support the retention of a security expert to evaluate each school's layout to determine point of entry risks. I suspect that most campuses can be restricted by barriers/locking doors to allow for a centralized access point. Restricting the points of ingress and egress, in conjunction with a trained resource officer, will help secure our schools and help protect our children. Without knowing the cost, it is difficult to comment on the source of funds. I anticipate many modifications would be a one-time expense. Ideally, this could be addressed through the general fund. Alternatively, a self-terminating or one-time mileage could be considered to fund any capital improvements.