

## **St, Tammany School Board District 5**

Lee P. Barrios  
Charles Brandon Harrell

No Party  
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?**

#### **Lee P. Barrios**

*As an experienced mother, grandparent, educator, journalist and business woman, I have traveled the State of Louisiana the last twelve years since retiring from the St. Tammany Parish school system informing parents, listening to educators, speaking at legislative hearings and consulting with a wide array of stakeholders to develop real solutions to the challenges facing parents, students and teachers in their journeys through K-12 education.*

*My lifetime experiences have contributed to my ability to consider diverse viewpoints, research viable solutions and guide consensus when developing public policy. I was born in Baton Rouge when my dad was enrolled at LSU after serving in WWII. As a result of his career as an Air Force officer, I lived in numerous states, England and Germany and always attended public schools. I graduated from Baton Rouge High School when my dad was assigned to LSU as Commandant of Cadets for Air Force ROTC. I attended LSU and eventually moved to the Northshore where I raised my three children and pursued a variety of personal and professional interests.*

*Leadership is a necessary trait that I have practiced in both my personal and professional endeavors. Prior to teaching I became a horse enthusiast and riding instructor serving as both President of the La-Miss Dressage & Combined Training Association and as District Commissioner of the Tammany Trotters Pony Club. My twenty-five year professional career was primarily focused on my administrative skills as owner of "9 to 5" Typing Services, court reporter transcriptionist, and manuscript typist for the well-known writer Walker Percy. Mr. Percy inspired me to return to school at the age of 42 to obtain my education degree.*

*I have the education expertise to understand and effectively carry out my role as a school board member. At the age of 45, I received my education degree with certification in English Language Arts and Journalism. Four years later I completed my master's degree in Secondary Education and certification in gifted. Those degrees qualified me for a four-year stint reporting for The Baton Rouge Advocate and 17 years as a teacher of gifted students. I achieved National Board Certification, was recognized as 2004-05 Louisiana PTA Educator of Distinction and served as President of the St. Tammany Association for Gifted/Talented Education.*

*I have experience testifying before the Louisiana Legislature and participated in the writing of legislation with legislators Brett Geymann, Bob Hensgens, Lance Harris and A. G. Crowe. I have a long record of publicly questioning our local school board and the State Board of Education, filing hundreds of public records requests and pursuing solutions to my concerns.*

*My experience, expertise, leadership and firsthand understanding of the challenges of providing a quality education for every child best qualify me for a position on the St. Tammany School Board.*

#### **Charles Brandon Harrell**

*I think the three most significant factors to assure you that my service on the St. Tammany Parish School Board will be both transparent and accountable is because my daughter and two sons are current students. Additionally, my wife is a certified teacher with 20 years of service in our schools. I have been on the Board for 4 years and was unanimously elected by my fellow board members to serve as President of the School Board in 2021 and 2022. Having lived within the boundaries of district 5 for over 30 years and due to my age and the ages of my children, I know that the decisions I make on the board directly affect the children of childhood friends, my children's friends, the children's that I coach,*

*the parents and children that I see at my children's schools and extracurricular events, and my neighbors. The students are not just nameless faces in every grade at any school to me.*

- 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?**

**Lee P. Barrios**

*The new certification program and teacher pay raises have just been instituted this school year. It will take some time to see the effects of both actions. However, the school board has not made a significant effort to recruit teachers or substitutes.*

*Although it's not the duty of the school board members themselves to actively participate in that activity, I would absolutely reach out to my statewide teaching contacts and universities to develop a serious recruitment plan. Keep in mind that this shortage is statewide and nationwide. Our school board has also not acknowledged nor do they understand that teachers are resigning and retiring because their profession has been under attack. We have an unfair and ineffective teacher evaluation system and we have mandates from our own school board and from the state that prevent autonomy and expertise as professionals. We have to make teaching a respected profession and provide our teachers with conditions that support quality teaching.*

*Another huge problem that neither the school board nor central office will publicly address is that so many teachers are teaching out of their field of expertise. To say that all teachers in St. Tammany are 100% certified is not true. There are over 300 teachers teaching on OFAT certifications this year. OFAT means Out of Field Authorization to Teach. These include many special education and gifted teacher positions. For the past several years as these positions have become harder to fill, administration has offered new teachers the opportunity for a job in their field if they will work on an OFAT for 2-3 years which is the limitation on the certification. While some OFAT teachers have decided they would like to stay in special education or gifted, they cannot afford to pursue their required master's degrees and add-on certifications. This school board has not provided teacher tuition exemption to address that. This district can certainly afford to do that. Actually, this district cannot afford NOT to do that.*

**Charles Brandon Harrell**

*Teacher shortages are a serious concern of the board and administration. The administration is vigorously pursuing solutions and the Board will do everything possible to secure qualified and certified staffing. This situation was created by the tremendous population growth in our Parish. The main reason for this explosive growth is the St. Tammany Parish Public School System and the quality education that all of our students receive.*

- 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?**

**Lee P. Barrios**

*It's not a perception. It is reality. Teachers trust me and confide in me every day with specific examples of lack of support and poor treatment. Very few teachers will speak out because their jobs are at risk. I can absolutely verify that there have been repercussions for teachers who speak out or question policy. As a school board member I will bring these issues to administration and to the public. There is a current situation right now where the school board approved a new curriculum for K-2 classes but the materials have not yet arrived 6 weeks into the school year? Who is to be held accountable for that? A teacher's working conditions are her students' learning conditions.*

*Another huge problem is the restriction placed on teachers to teach standardized curriculums with pacing instructions that limit or eliminate their ability to create engaging lesson plans that meet the*

*needs of their students. This district needs to provide teachers with quality curriculum and allow them to determine how and when to teach it within the parameters of the standards.*

*In the bigger picture, schools should be teacher-led. When teachers collaborate and are given certain authority to create optimum learning environments, everyone benefits. Administrators are not in the classroom and play a very different role in the conduct of public schools. There has been great focus placed on TEACHER accountability but with little to no authority for teachers to create the conditions or the model under which they are evaluated. Accountability has to be meaningful at all levels. Where is the accountability for the school board and administration?*

**Charles Brandon Harrell**

*The school board and administration is supporting our teachers and staff. Our teachers are dedicated and perform exceptionally well under less than perfect situations. They typically devote time and effort for many excellent programs and duties that are truly outside of their teaching responsibilities but these are some of the very things that have made our schools and staff exceptional. Our legislature continues to mandate more responsibilities on our teachers and staff. These mandates in the class room and trainings are taking away from our student's instructional time.*

- 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?**

**Lee P. Barrios**

*As to the funding concern let me say this; St. Tammany has the money to install artificial turf and upgraded athletic facilities at every high school at over \$1 million each. We can budget the money to make our schools safe.*

*Every school should have a perimeter fence with controlled entrance and exit during every school day. Large campuses might require camera monitoring at the perimeter gates. Architects for new schools should be tasked with providing viable designs in their bid submissions. There has been plenty of research done nationally to provide guidance. Safety has to be an intentional effort, not just a public perception. If the public, parents and teachers do not want to live in a lock down atmosphere all the time, then practical measures can provide much better safety provisions than we have now at some of the schools. I would recommend a task force to research the possibilities and the source of required funding. That task force would bring their recommendations to the public.*

**Charles Brandon Harrell**

*Safety of our students is and will always be our highest priority. The older school designs continue to provide exceptional education to many students, but some changes were needed to upgrade the security of these facilities to today's standards. I have personally spoken with law enforcement at the federal, state, and local levels. The recommendation they made to me that would have the biggest effect on deterring crime is using perimeter fencing and having a single point of entry to the campus for visitors. Our schools are currently in the process of having a badge pass system installed at every school which will be completed by the end of this school year. Every school has a school resource officer, a full time nurse, and a mental health provider to support school safety. We are very thankful to have an extremely close working relationship with all of the local law enforcement and fire personnel. There are many preparations and unseen activities, such as on-site emergency training exercises, the details of which need not be discussed for security reasons. We always welcome frequent visits and inspections from our partners. We are always open to any suggestions or recommendations to further protect our students.*