

## **St, Tammany School Board District 6**

Daniel Jenkins	Republican	Answered #1 and #3 with same answer
Amanda Reed Martin	Republican	
Michael C. Nation	Republican	
Erica Radosta	No Party	
Tracy Ann Vicknair	Republican	No response to 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?**

#### **Daniel Jenkins**

*The lessons and experiences during my active service time as a US Marine have taught me my core values of Honor, Courage, and Commitment. My combat deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan taught me how to work together with people of different backgrounds, experience, and cultures to ensure a common goal while ensuring it has been accomplished safely and with a productive outcome. My experience as a Substitute Teacher and Football Coach allowed me the understanding of the frustration and struggles from both The Teacher and Student educational aspects. My experience as a Father has showed me how the flawed system has become while breaking the trust and integrity and claims all is well.*

#### **Amanda Reed Martin**

*St. Tammany Parish public schools and teachers made a difference in my life. I believe in quality public education. My husband and I are proud to be products of St. Tammany Parish public schools. We have five children in three different public schools. Absolutely, I have a personal interest in preserving and improving the quality of our schools. I want to help our school board become a passionate force, dedicated to improving the quality of public education for every child in our community. My husband and I both have postgraduate degrees and have made education a top priority in our home. Our children are all good students and involved in many areas within our public schools. We have children in the gifted department, talented art, talented music, orchestra, athletics, and various clubs. I am familiar with these different departments and how they operate in our schools. I am blessed to be able to stay at home and raise our five children. Because of that, I have been an active volunteer in our schools for the past nine years. I am currently the PTA president at Mandeville Elementary and personally responsible for the success of many events on the school calendar this year. This means I am usually on campus several days during the week. During this time, I have the pleasure of speaking with administrators, teachers, students, and other parents. I am well aware of the issues we face in our schools, because I speak directly to the people affected by them most.*

*All school district participants need to be held accountable for their involvement within our schools. That means everybody! School board members need to be held accountable for asking more questions and doing better research on the topics presented at meetings. Administration needs to be held accountable for financial decisions. Transparency in the budget will show where we can cut wasteful spending and direct those resources toward more important things like school safety. Students need to be held accountable for their grades and their behavior. Parents need to be held accountable for getting their children to school and being involved with schoolwork. Teachers need to be held accountable for promptly entering grades for their students. If we hold each other accountable throughout the process, our children will succeed in the end. My children have 13 more years in our school district. I am ready and eager to be the voice for our students, our parents, and our teachers. My experience as a former student, a current parent, an active volunteer, and a lifelong resident of St. Tammany have prepared me for this challenge.*

#### **Michael C. Nation**

*First and foremost, my experience as School Board Member for the last eight years qualifies me for the position – my final term, if re-elected – as does my experience as Board President in 2020, the year we*

*faced unprecedented issues with COVID-19, remote learning, and mask mandates. As vice president of a company in the maritime industry, I have supervisory and executive-level leadership experience. As the husband of a teacher and the father of three children who all attended St. Tammany Parish Public Schools, I have significant insights. Moreover, in my two terms on the Board I have proven my commitment to transparency, both in budgeting and in the setting of curriculum. During the Covid lockdown, and again while president, I required board meetings to be live streamed to allow the public immediate access to watch the meetings. Just this month, I introduced a measure for the system to adopt the St. Tammany School Board Checkbook, which will provide transparent, easy access to the check ledger.*

**Erica Radosta**

*The background I bring to the School Board is strictly as a parent and community member. I parented a student with significant academic and emotional challenges through St. Tammany Parish grades 3-9. I've watched my younger two learn in a Montessori environment ages up until grades 2 and 3, and now have them at Woodlake Elementary. I bring the perspective of what empowered educators can do in the Montessori environment, and the knowledge of a parent's experience advocating for a disadvantaged student through an IEP, 504 program, SPLC, etc.*

**Tracy Ann Vicknair**

*No response*

- 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?**

**Daniel Jenkins**

*No response*

**Amanda Reed Martin**

*The teacher shortage crisis in St. Tammany schools is the result of many years of bad decision making and lack of support. My husband and I were students at Mandeville Elementary, Mandeville Middle, Mandeville Junior High, and Mandeville High. Our schools were top in the state during that time. The waiting list to become a teacher in St. Tammany Parish was long, and it took multiple trips to job fair to be offered a coveted teaching position. Now, we have incredible teachers with master's degrees leaving our schools to pursue other professions, despite the fact that they really enjoy teaching. What has happened to cause such a shift and how do we fix it? This is not something that will be fixed quickly. First and foremost, our district administration and our school board representatives must start truly listening to our teachers and our parents. We cannot hope to attract quality teachers if our current teachers feel unsupported and unappreciated. We need to improve our current environment and increase moral. Only then, will we attract the talent our students deserve.*

*Teachers must have a voice! Their professional opinions matter. As a whole, the school board needs to rely more on input from teachers before deciding on policy changes or choosing curriculums. Our teachers are expected to achieve certain benchmarks throughout the year. Many times these are set at unrealistic levels. Their expertise on how to achieve those benchmarks should be considered more. I will promote teacher creativity and do my best to find ways to give them some of their autonomy back. As a board member, I will talk to all of my teachers and administrators in district 6. Together we will find ways to eliminate unnecessary busy work. I will work with other board members to find the resources my teachers feel they need in their classrooms. We need to find a way to remove things from their plates before anything else gets added. Once we create a wonderful working environment within our schools, we will no longer be worried about filling vacancies. In the meantime, it would be wise to put our many instructional coaches back into our classrooms, as these are certified teachers with master's degrees. We should not be splitting classes when certified teachers are available within our schools.*

**Michael C. Nation**

*The teacher shortage in St. Tammany is not nearly as bad as has been reported and rumoured. At last check, we are short 75 or so teachers – 3% of our total teacher workforce of 2400 – still too many, but*

*far from a crisis point. We still maintain very low student-to-teacher ratios. To fill those vacancies, I would support the Administration in rehiring retired educators, even if only temporarily, and – of course – a continued recruitment program to draw certified teachers to our parish. I also support our administration's plan to train our own teachers by recruiting qualified people who have had successful careers and who now wish to move into education.*

**Erica Radosta**

*In my opinion, the teacher shortage is a top priority facing St. Tammany Parish right now. Based on my current understanding, I support the Board looking into hiring Educational Staffing Solutions as an outside company to provide consistent, qualified, and vetted substitute teachers in the parish. As with most issues, I am interested to hear arguments on both sides and perspectives from people with experiences that vary from my own. I believe this is the best way to handle the many complicated issues the Board assesses every year.*

**Tracy Ann Vicknair**

*No response*

- 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?**

**Daniel Jenkins** same answer as for #1

*The lessons and experiences during my active service time as a US Marine have taught me my core values of Honor, Courage, and Commitment. My combat deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan taught me how to work together with people of different backgrounds, experience, and cultures to ensure a common goal while ensuring it has been accomplished safely and with a productive outcome. My experience as a Substitute Teacher and Football Coach allowed me the understanding of the frustration and struggles from both The Teacher and Student educational aspects. My experience as a Father has showed me how the flawed system has become while breaking the trust and integrity and claims all is well.*

**Amanda Reed Martin**

*Our teachers are amazing; we need to allow them to do what they were trained to do. Unfortunately, the perception that our St. Tammany teachers lack the support they need is a very true reality. Daily, our teachers are being asked to do more tasks than they should be required to handle. I see this every time I volunteer in our schools. If our district administration and current school board representatives made greater efforts to spend time within our schools, they too would see that our teachers' plates are overflowing. It is foolish to think our teachers can teach to the best of their abilities while also dealing with technology issues, discipline problems, excessive testing, and useless training. At the end of the day, it is our children who suffer. According to the latest LEAP results, 4 in 10 Louisiana third graders cannot read at grade level. I spend a tremendous amount of time in one of our elementary schools. I can, without a doubt, tell you the third grade teachers there are phenomenal! They are well trained, top-notch teachers. If our third grade students are not reaching literary standards, it is partly because our teachers are forced to waste valuable instructional minutes on other things. District administration needs to spend time looking at how we can remove unnecessary tasks from our teachers' plates. I would like to clarify that I do not believe school level administration is responsible for the extra burden placed on our teachers. Most often, this extra work is being created by guidelines and procedures handed down from district administration, the school board, and the state. Although we may not have much power to change things at the state level, we most certainly have the power to create better policies to help our teachers and students thrive. That should always be our goal*

**Michael C. Nation**

*I regularly visit the schools in my district, and speak with administrators and teachers. I am and will always be fully available to any teacher or other staff member who wishes to discuss such concerns with me, and am perfectly willing to do so in confidence. If changes need to be made in how teachers are treated or managed, I will take necessary steps to achieve them.*

### **Erica Radosta**

*I would address the perception that teachers lack the support they need by treating it as a reality, not just a perception. Ask teachers (either through a survey or other method) for specifics on their needs that aren't being supported. Identify the needs that can be addressed quickly at the school level through improved communication or reallocation of existing resources, without the need for board intervention. For the needs that rise to board level, add them to the agenda for discussion. Invite teachers to come speak. I see it as a Board Member's duty to really listen to our teachers and work to get them the support they need, especially now when retention of good educators is essential.*

### **Tracy Ann Vicknair**

*No response*

- 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?**

### **Daniel Jenkins**

*No response*

### **Amanda Reed Martin**

*Currently, I believe our administration is doing a great job addressing school safety. Ensuring school safety is of the utmost importance. Our children cannot learn if they do not feel safe. St. Tammany Parish schools have several safety measures in place that schools in other districts do not employ. Assistant Superintendent, Michael Cosse, recently gave a comprehensive overview of safety measures within the district. He reported that new magnetic lock systems are already in place at most parish schools, and that all schools will have key card entries ready by the end of 2022. Each school also has an Incident Command System Team on campus that meets monthly to discuss campus safety. Classrooms are locked during instructional time, lockdown drills are routinely conducted, and the district has a written proactive readiness emergency plan to help prevent and respond to any crisis. We have a school resource officer, a mental health provider, and a nurse in all of our district schools. That being said, there are still several safety measures that can be improved. The perimeter fencing surrounding some of our schools is old and has gaps, providing a point of entry for an intruder. Fencing could be higher at other schools and be equipped with sensors and/or cameras. In February, a man was arrested on Mandeville High School campus for yelling profanities at students. If the perimeter barriers were better, he may have been detected on campus before interacting with students. We have many cameras in our schools and on our buses, but we need more. I believe a dedicated disciplinarian at each school is necessary to handle bullying, ISS, and discipline problems in the classroom. These are things that are currently unaddressed or being pushed onto our teachers during valuable instructional time. Since we have a strong foundation, much or all of the funding for increased security can come from our existing budget by simply cutting unnecessary spending or directing funds more appropriately.*

### **Michael C. Nation**

*School violence around the country has become all too common and, thankfully, we have been spared from that epidemic. Some years ago, voters approved a millage specifically for school security and school mental health. We have now placed an armed, trained police officer or deputy sheriff in every school in the parish, and a trained mental health provider at every school in the parish to work proactively with children and parents in heading off problems before they reach a crisis point. We also have limited points of entry during the school day, enhanced security screening procedures, and installed cameras at all schools. All classrooms are having automatic locking mechanisms being installed so that classrooms can be secured immediately if a threat is present. I will always put the safety of our students, teachers and staff foremost among my priorities. We could have the best schools in the country, but if they aren't safe, they're worthless.*

**Erica Radosta**

*I don't have a strong understanding of the realistic options available to reinforce security at our schools. This is one where I would need to listen to other School Board members and ideas from stakeholders in the district. However, I do not believe that arming teachers is a step in the right direction.*

**Tracy Ann Vicknair**

*No response*