

St, Tammany School Board District 8

James Lyle	Republican	
Kathryn Martin	Republican	withdrew (Sec of State)
'Mike' Peterson	Republican	
Peggy Seeley	Republican	withdrew (Sec of State)
Don Thanars	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?**

James Lyle

As a business-owner with multiple federal contracts, I am extremely familiar with budgeting and transparency. Having home-schooled my two daughters because they were not being served in St. Tammany Public Schools, I have significant experience in curriculum and goal-setting to achieve and exceed state standards.

'Mike' Peterson

My responsibilities for 37 years as a classroom teacher, coach, athletic director, disciplinary assistant principal, and high school principal required that my decisions and actions be clear and prudent. My personal educational training has been in Educational Supervision and Leadership (Ph.D.) and School Administration (M.Ed.)

Don Thanars

I am a go-getter and I believe in honest, open, and transparent communication at all levels. I spent 21 years in the US Marine Corps as an officer responsible for some of our most precious assets – sons, daughters, fathers, wives, and others. It was imperative that they were well prepared, trained, and equipped to accomplish all assigned tasks to the highest degree. Additionally, I've held positions of the highest level and clearance requiring the utmost trust, confidence and accountability. I have also served on several boards, such as the Fire District #11 Board, and currently serving as Board Member, Harbor Center Board of Commissioners where accountability and transparency are paramount to maintain credibility and trust with our constituents. I'm well versed and knowledgeable in Robert's Rules of Order. I'm also a graduate of the FBI National Academy and possess a Bachelor Business Administration; Master of Business Administration; and a Master of Arts (Computer Information and Resource Management. These collective experiences coupled with the skills and training I have received are relevant and invaluable to ensuring transparency and reestablishing credibility, trust and confidence in the board. Further, I will be actively engaged and present in the schools, conversing with students, teachers, staffs, administrators, and parents to ensure that I am aware of their concerns and ideas; and share those with the other board members and the administration in order to shape our agendas and influence budget decisions. Moreover, I will provide feedback to my constituents, either directly or in regular community forums or meetings to ensure that communication is continuous and flowing in both directions.

- 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?**

James Lyle

The quickest answer to the teacher shortage is simple – hire recently retired teachers to fill the gaps, even if only until permanent faculty can be found. Long-term, we MUST work to ensure the best salaries and benefits possible, treat teachers fairly, and work reasonably with the Federation of Teachers. What we must NOT do is lower hiring standards.

‘Mike’ Peterson

The recent allowance for experienced, retired teachers to return to the classroom is a good attempt to fill the void. However, a long range plan to attract qualified teachers and retain them must be developed. Teachers need working environments that afford them security, respect, order, and a level of student discipline that allows for quality teaching and learning to take place daily.

Don Thanars

I would be in communication with the administration to determine if they have reached out the retired teacher community to fill immediate vacancies, either on a short-term or long-term basis. Simultaneously I would be working with the union to develop a plan that would support this effort and not create any conflicts with their current retirement status. Additionally, I would want to identify some of our top performing paraprofessionals, who have the requisite experience with their grade level curriculum, and align them with a certified teacher, while providing a financial incentive to assist them in obtaining their degree and certification. In effect, create a “Grow Your Own” type program.

- 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?**

James Lyle

I don’t know who is reporting that teachers feel unsupported by the administration, but I’m sadly not surprised. As a School Board Member, I will make it a priority to meet regularly with faculty of the schools in my district – and any teacher from any school who wishes to reach out. Of course, School Board Members should have regular interaction with principals and with District Administrators, but the classroom-level teachers must NOT be overlooked. I will listen with an open mind, and will always support our educators over bureaucracy and internal politics.

‘Mike’ Peterson

Teachers need to be part of the solution in their schools as to how work gets done more efficiently without infringing upon their preparation time and instructional quality. Team teaching, mentorship, and additional planning time for elementary teachers, and an orderly school environment can give our teachers the additional support they need. Some situations may simply require more personnel.

Don Thanars

I would be actively communicating with the teachers to understand their concerns and be a mouthpiece for them to the administration and board. Additionally, I would hold recurring teacher meetings to provide feedback directly to them about their issues or concerns. I would also advocate for them and be one of their biggest cheerleaders. My wife has been a loyal and devoted educator for almost 40 years and our oldest daughter is a teacher in Alvin ISD with over 20 years of teaching experience. I believe in teachers and the critical role they play in the lives of our children. Most importantly, their role to ensure that our children receive the highest quality education. We must support them and ensure that they know we value them.

- 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?

James Lyle

My primary work is for the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Defense, and I am a former deputy sheriff. Safety and security are, naturally, of utmost concern. I know the District is well-funded for school security, and I will support continuing and improving measures to protect the people we are supposed to serve – including faculty and staff.

‘Mike’ Peterson

We need to have qualified individuals review each building design and determine how best to secure those structures from unauthorized entry. The fortifying of all parameters such as secure fencing, updated cameras and personnel to observe the cameras during the school day, the presence of an SRO (security reserve officer) on every campus during the school day, educating all faculty and staff to be alert and how to respond to possible threats, re-examining the current protocols for possible campus intrusions, and developing a faculty trained response team are only a few possibilities to consider. Funds must be allocated for the safety and security of our children, and all school site personnel.

Don Thanars

To address the critical problem of ensuring school safety today and in the future, I would review current protocols and processes with school officials, the school resource officers, and the sheriff’s department leadership to determine what security gaps currently exist. I have direct relevant experience as a force protection officer, critical infrastructure protection and training, and insight that I can offer to enhance current processes or procedures. Initial recommendations may only require procedural and behavioral changes. However, more long-term security improvements may require structural changes and other technological solutions which will have budgetary implications. To pay for these security enhancements and upgrades, I would first review current plans with the administration to determine their feasibility or viability. Second, in conjunction with the administration and the sheriff’s office leadership, work to develop a long-term security plan aligned with the budget. To do this, may require rescoping future projects or possibly postponing them, if critical security deficiencies mandate more immediate action. Third, I would want review best practices and lessons learned from around the country and incorporate pertinent recommendations into our security strategy and posture. In today’s climate, this is vitally important to ensure that we have safe and secure environment conducive to learning.