

CANDIDATE FORUM

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 MOMS OF BLACK BOYS UNITED
 FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

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 Demanding Excellence in Education
**Candidate: Dawn Collins, District 4****On Candidate Backgrounds, Roles and Responsibilities of the Board and Education Issues and Needs**

1. What do you see as the role of the school board and how has your background prepared you to fulfill this role? With Act I of 2012, the law says the role of the school board is to hire the superintendent, govern and vote on policy and budget. But, as elected officials, we have been voted on by our respective communities to lead. We must do our part to, first and foremost,

inform community of the status of our schools, as well as the needs and pressing issues our schools are facing. Then, with community support, we can develop strategy on how to be a support system to our children and the staff that are on the front lines educating them.

2. What are the top two challenges facing public education in our city? i. Poverty – not because poor children can't learn as well, but because our school accountability system does an excellent job on measuring poverty – the correlation between poverty and poor student performance is so strong, one would be fooled into thinking it is more causation than correlation. We need to investigate the current accountability methods. At present it is hurting our children – many students and educators push so hard to perform well only to be told they are nothing but failures. What is it when year after year after year, all one hears is "I'm a failure, I'm a failure, I'm a failure?" Self-fulfilling prophecy? If poverty was the causation, then, for example, students who accept vouchers to go to private schools would not perform worse once in the private school. They would at least remain stagnate assuming the private school is teaching the same standards public schools are mandated to teach as the most important standards; but research has proven poor voucher students lose any gains they made in a public school. What are the standardized tests really testing? ii. The de-professionalization of educators – the saying goes, "If you can't do, teach." There was a time when educators were perceived as beacons of their community. This shift has contributed greatly to the current shortage of quality teachers in the classroom.

3. What are two needs that you consider priority for the school board to address? i. Increasing academic achievement with high level, well strategized academic intervention ii. Staff pay increases

4. The School Board only has authority as whole. What skills or traits do you possess that will contribute to the effective operation of the board as a whole? I am very passionate about fighting for the needs of my students and the educators who teach them, but I am also equally passionate about hearing the concerns of those whom I don't usually agree with because there are times, when we listen to one another, that we can manage to agree and work towards a common goal, in a common way. In some small ways, I believe that approach has helped contribute to my colleagues and I working as a more efficient, unified body.

5. What responsibilities, if any, should school systems assume for addressing societal challenges such as poverty, homelessness, racial disparities and mental health? I believe strongly in the concept of community schools which is a revamp of "wrap around" services, but effective implementation of community schools across the entire requires more funding. We have to push to make education funding a priority on the state level. Local individuals are being taxed enough.

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6. Currently of the 18,000 students sent to alternative education sites, 85% of them are African American and 66% of them are male. What is your opinion on the disparities that exist in our school system's alternative education and discipline practices? Please forgive my hesitancy in responding to this question.

I need to request current numbers from the district office regarding the number of students in alternative education. We have roughly 40,000 students total in the EBRPSS school system, 18,000 in alternative education sites would mean almost half the students are in alternative education which at a glance seems inaccurate. With regard to the percentages, that actually reflects the school system as a whole. The numbers of white flight are more significant than many realize. All that being said, there are many improvements to be made in alternative education.

7. Do you oppose or support zero tolerance policies that exclude children from the classroom? I vehemently oppose zero tolerance policies.

8. If elected, what specific actions will you take to support schools and school districts to refocus their resources and energy away from harsh discipline and toward restorative practices to address conflicts? As a current school board member, I have pushed the issue. There is a TEDTalk of Judge Victoria Pratt that I shared with district office staff where she explains the simple power of her showing those whom she gives a sentence to something as basic as respect. Their recidivism rates dropped. There is also other research that shows the same. Our partner in education, iCARE, has begun implementing professional development on restorative justice. We could use additional support reinforcing it. ii. The TEDTalk video can be found here

https://www.ted.com/talks/victoria_pratt_how_judges_can_show_respect?language=en

9. Do you support or oppose increasing the presence of law enforcement officers in schools?

I oppose it. School resource officers do not have to be police officers, but it has been that way for so long people don't even question it which is problematic. It helps contribute to the difference between the treatment of students in public school (mostly minority) and students in more elite settings. When Skipper at the elite school gets in trouble, unless it is a major offense, Skipper's parents get called and they work it out. When Ray Ray at the public school does the same thing, sometimes even the principal is calling on the police officer for matters that are clearly for the principal and staff to handle. The U.N. did a study here shortly after the Alton Sterling shooting and found that police on school campuses contribute significantly to the school to prison pipeline. It is not to say that law enforcement officers are bad. It is simply to say that their presence on school campuses creates unintended consequences.

10. Do you oppose or support mandatory continuing implicit bias training and de-escalation training for educators and school resource officers? I support it, but it's got to come with a culture change; otherwise, it's just one more training to check off the check list..

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11. If elected, what specific actions will you take to support schools and school districts to provide the trainings necessary to equip teachers to support a diverse student body? This is honestly a difficult question for me to answer. I am open to suggestions. At present, the educators in the schools in my school district are reflective of the student body, for the most part. Generally speaking, however, one aspect that we don't talk enough about is something simple like living a life of "loving-kindness," and establishing that mindset and culture on school sites whether that's in partnerships with churches or any other civic organization.

That's primary in addition to making sure people are aware and respect cultural differences. Without it, it doesn't matter what training is given which is also a leadership issue. We can develop policy to support identifying, placing and retaining leaders who can establish the type of school culture needed.

12. Support for high quality early childhood is driven by research studies showing that children who participate in such programs can do vastly better in school and in their careers later in life. Do you oppose or support placing a tax proposition on the ballot that would pay for "universal early childhood education" in Baton Rouge from birth to age four? I am hesitant to place another tax on families. We already ask for an additional sales tax. However, if the tax is as progressive as possible and does not put too much of an additional strain, I am open because we absolutely must find a way to fund universal early childhood education.

13. If elected, what specific actions will you take to ensure "universal early childhood education tax proposition is placed on the ballot? See above. I am open to proposed strategies given the above conditions are met.

14. Racism is perhaps the most elusive, penetrating, and permeating challenge in our society. Since racism is an institutional problem, it needs to be solved through institutional change. When we see that our institutions have shown that they can operate in a way that serves the needs of all people equitably it makes it possible to see that racism can be eliminated. Racism was built into our system, and anything that was built can be dismantled. We must see to it that our institutions rise to the challenge of solving racism. If elected, would you participate in Dialogue on Race Louisiana's Original Series, an important step in a journey toward enlightenment, understanding and the elimination of racism from our society? I have already participated in both the Original Series and the Advanced Series and have facilitated as well.

15. Would you oppose or support a measure to require the school board and key school board system leadership to participate in the Dialogue on Race Original Series? It is not wise to require participation of something like Dialogue on Race. If a person cannot be persuaded that it is of value to them, all you would get is resentment from being forced and possible push back on any desired accomplishments past participating in the series. I can commit, however, to actively encouraging participation.

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16. Do you believe it is necessary to examine the history curriculum to ensure the curriculum is reflective of “the people's history” as expressed by organizations such as the Zinn Education Project? I absolutely believe it is necessary to examine the history curriculum.

17. If elected, would you oppose or support utilization of such educational resources? *As a current school board member, I have recommended such educational resources in the past and would be glad to do so again.*

18. What do you think is the role of the community in school system matters? [\[unanswered\]](#)

19. The School Board has a policy that parent and community engagement must be a priority for schools in East Baton Rouge. What are some specific strategies that the board can do to support schools in the development and implementation of family engagement practices? [\[unanswered\]](#)

20. What, if anything, do you believe the school board and school system, should be doing to address the increasing number of low performing schools in certain parts of our city? [\[unanswered\]](#)

21. Do you support more local accountability for the use of ESSA funds in producing better education outcomes in struggling schools? More specifically, do you support the school system annually issuing an ESSA Report to the public that shows how ESSA funds were budgeted and spent, what outcomes were achieved with the use of those funds, and the extent to which achievement outcomes did or did not improve for African American males? [\[unanswered\]](#)

22. Data shows there are significant disparities in key indicators of student success between African American males and other subgroups. These indicators include elementary and middle school achievement, high school graduation rates, ACT scores, Advanced Placements, TOPS awards, industry-based credentials, and school suspension and expulsions. What can the school system do to address these inequities? [\[unanswered\]](#)

23. What specifically should our school system be doing to ensure that not only do more African-American males complete high school but that they are connected to postsecondary opportunities? [\[unanswered\]](#)

24. Eighty-two percent of EBR students qualify for free and reduced lunch due to their economic status. In a report released by Together Baton Rouge, in 2017, East Baton Rouge Parish sacrificed \$69.6M in property taxes due to Industrial Tax Exemption Programs (ITEP). \$28.1M of this revenue could have been allocated to the East Baton Rouge parish school district. Do you support or oppose ITEP? [\[unanswered\]](#)