

CANDIDATE FORUM**Candidate: Mike Gaudet, District 7**

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OUR SCHOOLS. OUR EXCELLENCE!
Demanding Excellence in Education**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? The most important and primary role of the school board, and all involved with the school system, is to ensure a quality education for every child because every child is important and every child can learn. Each person has a different role to play in ensuring this outcome. The board has a responsibility to take the 1,000 foot view of the school system, ensure effective use of funds, provide organizational oversight and most importantly to make sure exceptional people are in place – and then to allow them to succeed without interference into the day to day decisions. The school system is a large organization with over 5,000 employees and a total budget over \$600 million. I believe my experience on the boards of other educational organizations and my corporate experience have helped me prepare for this role.

2. What are the top two challenges facing public education in our city? The top challenge facing public education in Baton Rouge is the continuing unsatisfactory performance in a major portion of our schools, many times because of things beyond their control. I want to support every school in the system without considering school board district lines. The second top challenge is to provide early childhood education to all students to help bridge the readiness gap. I look forward with working with Mayor Broome to find a multifaceted solution to this incredible problem.

3. What are two needs that you consider priority for the school board to address? I believe the board needs to successfully implement the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) programs in our low performing schools and closely monitor the progress of those schools. We have been granted extra money and resources to accomplish this and we must use those resources wisely and effectively to assist our teachers as they groom learners and leaders. The second priority would be to ensure every student has the opportunity to attend a high quality school in their neighborhood by enhancing our offerings and performance at non-magnet schools.

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 believe my education and experience, in both the corporate and volunteer world, has given me insight into how large operations work and organizational responsibilities such as financial reports, contracts, legal issues and organization structure. While I fully recognize that school systems are not businesses and cannot be run as such, there are many areas which have similarities to business operations. At all times, I keep a vision of a single child, at a single desk, to guide me in my actions.

5. What responsibilities, if any, should school systems assume for addressing societal challenges such as poverty, homelessness, racial disparities and mental health? I believe that schools must educate the whole child and those challenges shape and impact each and every child. The physical and mental needs of a child effect learning and must be addressed within our system. As one example, in the ESSA program, we will be providing more mental health counseling in the lower grades in order to address issues early and prevent larger issues later in life.

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**Candidate: Mike Gaudet, District 7****On Specific Issues of Interest to the Urban Congress on African- American Males, Moms of Black Boys United for Social Change, and The Power Coalition**

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? I believe that keeping students in their normal classroom is important. When that is not possible, we need to provide a quality

continuing educational experience to those students, one that finds the best within each child. I would like to see more resources dedicated to helping understand and resolve individual issues as opposed to punitive responses.

7. Do you oppose or support zero tolerance policies that exclude children from the classroom? I have encouraged the supt and attorney to revisit these type policies. I oppose zero tolerance policies that leave no room for judgment and no possibility of making a mistake. We must protect the safety of all students but we also need to show some level of understanding and balance.

8. If elected, what specific actions will you take to sport schools and school districts to refocus their resources and energy away from harsh discipline and toward restorative practices to address conflicts? I am not an expert in these areas but I am a good listener. I see the role of a board member as one who listens to what the experts and people in the schools and community say is needed and then works the operational side to get them the resources they need.

9. Do you support or oppose increasing the presence of law enforcement officers in schools? Personally I do not support an officer in every school. I believe that it is an over-reaction to social pressure and the money spent on those officers could be better spent elsewhere within the system.

10. Do you oppose or support mandatory continuing implicit bias training and de-escalation training for educators and school resource officers? I fully support de-escalation training and implicit bias training although possibly not mandatory. I would ask our staff to determine how best to accomplish this training given the heavy demands already placed upon our teachers.

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? As a board member, rather than suggest a specific program myself, I would prefer to hear from the staff on the ground what training they feel would be most useful. I would ask the system staff to review what training is now in place. I would then ask them to hold meetings with teachers, principals, parents and community groups to gather their input. Finally, the staff would recommend changes and/or additions to our professional development program to incorporate their findings.

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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 fully and completely support early childhood education. I think that we need to take a broad approach on this issue including Head Start and other city and state resources. If a comprehensive and broad plan was developed with reasonable a resource requirement, I could support a

tax proposition.

13. If elected, what specific actions will you take to ensure "universal early childhood education tax proposition is placed on the ballot? I would be more than willing to work on a committee representing Head Start, city and state functions to develop such a comprehensive plan.

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 would enjoy participating, as I believe that the only way we can move forward together is through open dialogue with people from every background.

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? While I would certainly hope that all board members would attend any trainings available to help us work together better, I do not believe it would be appropriate for me to choose a specific program or force individuals to participate. If people only participate out of a legal obligation, I do not believe that the series would have its intended outcome.

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 believe that we should use Tier 1 curriculum for our students because that is the information used for testing for school performance scores, ACT testing, etc. That said I do believe that other resources such as Zinn can be used as additional information for students and teachers so that all feel totally included in our history.

17. If elected, would you oppose or support utilization of such educational resources? I would support the utilization as a supplement at the option of the teacher, not the core.

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18. What do you think is the role of the community in school system matters? First and foremost, the community must participate in the election of their school board members. Just as important, the community must participate in the election of state legislators and get them to make education a priority. The state has held MFP allocations flat for many years while placing increasing responsibilities on the school system. The state legislature also controls the retirement system and has saddled the local systems with bills for their past failure to fully fund the benefits they bestowed. We must make sure our students get the resources they deserve.

I also think the community need to have a voice in the future of the school system, particularly in areas such as capital expenditures. The School Board needs to make sure this happens.

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? I believe that we need to enhance the offerings and performance of our non-magnet schools by providing addition resources to those schools. A student (and their parents) should be able to get a quality education at their neighborhood school. The choice of a magnet or focused school should be based upon the desire to participate in a special program, not to get a quality education. Better neighborhood schools would help re-establish the connection between the schools and the community, which has been severely broken. This would provide bigger and better opportunities for the community to take an active role in the schools.

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? I believe we have two important actions. One is to successfully implement and monitor our ESSA programs. The second is to make sure every low performing school has an effective principal at the head. Our Superintendent has been making this a priority.

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? Yes

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? I believe the biggest thing we can do, as a school system, is to focus on early childhood and elementary education. Nothing lasting can be built without a strong foundation. We must focus on creating a true variety of high quality options so that each student – particularly those in struggling sub-groups – can find the school and pathway that is the best fit for them.

Finally, we must hold ourselves accountable on improving our low performing schools – be they traditional or charter.

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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? I believe one of the keys to high school graduation rates is keeping the students interested and involved in activities. We are continuing to increase our STEM efforts, special programs, expanding magnet programs at non-magnet schools, our new CTEC program, expanded AP courses, arts programs, athletics, etc. There is no silver bullet but rather it will take a combination of offerings to ensure every student gets what

they need.

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? I support a reasonable ITEP, one that is much more focused than in the past. I believe the new rules implemented by the State of Louisiana represent a big step forward. We must continue to grow the economy of Baton Rouge. A recent article in the paper spoke of job growth in the region because of large industrial projects. Unfortunately, not one of those large industrial projects was inside EBR. Therefore, EBR is not receiving any sales and property taxes on those projects. We are working very hard to educate our students and prepare them for employment. We need to make sure that employment opportunities exist within EBR.