

League of Women Voters of Hilton Head Island/Bluffton Area
Questionnaire for Candidates Running for the Beaufort County Board of
Education

Districts 6 and 9 - November 8, 2016 Election

The League had to cancel a forum that was scheduled for October 6 and is offering this candidate questionnaire instead in order to provide voters with information. We are grateful to the candidates for participating.

Unfortunately, in some instances it was necessary to cut off answers in order to comply with a 125 word limit.

District 9 Candidates and Their Contact Information

Christopher Epps

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Bill Fletcher

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Bridgette Frazier

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Christina Gwozdz, MD

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District 6 Candidates and Their Contact Information

Dr. Patricia Felton-Montgomery

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Dr. Paul M. Roth, Incumbent

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1. What in your experience and education makes you the best qualified candidate?

Answers by District 9 candidates:

Christopher Epps

As an Architect, I am trained to find solutions to a set of problems through the help of specialists. I have also served on both non-profit and governmental boards as well as Rotary in High School and the Beaufort County Anti-Bullying Task Force. I am also the graduate of the inaugural class of the Greater Bluffton Chamber Leadership classes. Growing up in the Lowcountry, I am a product of the Beaufort County School system and know firsthand its strengths and weaknesses.

Bill Fletcher

I LISTEN – Since 1998, I have worked hard to earn the trust of our community both as a businessman and volunteer in our community. The most important aspect of my job in working with clients is listening to their needs so that I may obtain a level of understanding that is necessary to provide relevant solutions. I want to bring that same level of trust to our school board by listening to the stakeholders in our community.

I LEARN – I continually educate myself so that I can communicate accurate and effective solutions.

I LEAD – I believe “Leadership is action, not position.” I roll up my sleeves, lead by example, and work collaboratively with others to achieve the highest and best results.

Bridgette Frazier

My experience as an educator makes me the most qualified for this position. I will be the only board member who has been and is still in the classroom. That alone gives me the insight necessary when judging which policies are feasible and practical in terms of our students and educators. I have received the "highly qualified" teaching status on my licensure for every state in which I've taught. I have also always been active, involved and engaged with my community on more than a business level. I volunteer, spearhead community initiatives, and work to keep people informed on policies that may impact them. I'm not just looking to get involved, I've been involved.

Christina Gwozdz

I have experience serving on boards:

Outpatient Surgery Center of Hilton Head (OSCHH)

Property Owners Associations (commercial and residential)

Cape Elizabeth, ME Board of Education (student representative)

My current elected leadership positions include:
President of the SC Society of Otolaryngology/Head and Neck Surgery
SC Medical Association House of Delegates member

I own and manage my medical practice and I am a co-founder/co-owner of the OSCHH.
I also manage rental real estate property.

I earned undergraduate (B.A. in mathematics) and graduate degrees (M.D.) at highly selective institutions. As a physician, I critically analyze situations and provide solutions. I am a person of integrity and have great experience working well with others. My three sons were educated in the BCSD before attending Princeton University.

Answers by District 6 candidates:

Patricia Felton-Montgomery

I have over 40 years of service as a teacher, guidance counselor, child study team coordinator, principal, assistant superintendent, and superintendent in urban and suburban public schools and at national, regional, and state levels of public education. My focus is on providing rigorous, standards-based and relevant instruction to students for the 21st century. With proven success in working with diverse student populations and communities, expertise in innovative curriculum and professional development, data-driven decision making, and effective school and district leadership, I have been called on by boards of education, school districts and regional educational organizations seeking guidance and support in establishing and sustaining school improvement.

Paul Roth

Have resided in BC for 20 years, raised 2 children here, served the town of HH on its planning commission, founded the Main Street Youth Theater (CEO for 8 years) ,and on the BCSD for 4 years.I am a graduate of Allegheny College PBK and the Harvard Business School (MBA Degree. Business career includes high level board and management careers in Advertising, Banking , Investment Banking, Venture capital . Non profit includes trustee of Allegheny College a, screen Actors guild P&W plan. Bcsd employs 43 drs. Of Ed and only one Harvard MBA. No member of Board comes close to this background.

2. The BCSD has been criticized for its handling of controversial decisions and its perceived lack of transparency and clear communication with the public. What recommendations do you have for improving the Board's relationship with the community?

Answers by District 9 candidates:

Christopher Epps

It will not be easy, we will need to first need to let Mr. Moss go and move forward on gaining back the trust of the people of Beaufort County. Then we need to have more transparency in the decision process. Step by step we will need to prove to the electorate that the board can be trusted again. As we gain public confidence, we will be able to move the focus back to the efforts of changing the education system to the betterment of the community.

Bill Fletcher

The Board is comprised of eleven elected representatives, therefore, it is incumbent upon each individual board member to effectively LISTEN and COMMUNICATE effectively with their constituency. Often times too little is communicated too late, leaving our citizens wondering what is going on, or why their input on certain issues wasn't solicited prior to the Board's vote. If elected, I intend to continue my efforts in making sure our citizens are well-informed through social media and community events. I am disappointed (and frankly, disgusted) at the misinformation that is being perpetuated by others, particularly in reference to the 1% Educational Capital Sales Tax referendum. As an active parent and district volunteer, I will continue to do what I am already doing in "setting the record straight".

Bridgette Frazier

The lack of transparency is something that seems to prevail government in general in our society. People simply want to be informed beforehand and even during a decision and not after. Delivery is key so instead of being talked at, the public deserves to have those in office who are willing to talk with them. I suggested in a previous survey and in my campaign spiel, that I'd implement hosting bi-monthly or quarterly sessions with my constituents to keep them abreast of district initiatives and hear their concerns on district matters.

Christina Gwozdz

The School Board must build a foundation of trust and transparency with the citizens of Beaufort County. This will not happen overnight but the process can begin as soon as new board members are seated. Once this foundation is established, the Board can gain the support of the community to accomplish necessary improvements/expenditures for the school district, e.g. capital projects, raising teacher salaries, expanding instructional programs, etc.

Transparency is critical to a well-functioning school board because it allows the public to

provide input. The School Board must properly supervise the superintendent. Unethical conduct must not be tolerated. We need a new board majority with members like myself who value the importance of open and ethical governance and are willing to deal with difficult issues.

Answers by District 6 candidates:

Patricia-Felton Montgomery

I am running to become a member of the school board because I believe a coalition of board members who hold integrity and transparency in high regard can be the catalyst for changing the culture of the present board. This election provides an opportunity for a **new majority** of the board to be elected and bring about this kind of change. It is important that I model respectful interactions with the public in responding to concerns and answering questions so that trust is re-established between the board and the community and as an appropriate example to the children the board serves.

During my campaign I have thoughtfully and purposefully met with several members of the present Board of Education so that I can begin, even now, to understand....

Paul Roth

The operative word here is “perceived”. IN fact the parents, teachers and and students see a very fine District vastly improved in performance. Moving the county from the bottom half to the top half in the state. This does not sell newspapers or feed the politically ambitious that seek to exploit a vastly complex business operation in its own right, about which they cannot contemplate.

3. Do you support the two referenda having to do with school finance that will be on the ballot on November 8? Why?

Answers by District 9 candidates:

Christopher Epps

I do not support the referendums. We need to fix the spending problem first before we look at additional funding avenues. In addition, as a licensed Architect, I will be able to plan for future growth and make substantial financial decisions on building support.

Bill Fletcher

I am the only candidate who supports both ballot initiatives approved by the Board. In my opinion, the District has provided reasonable proof that:

- Continued increase in student enrollment will require the construction/expansion of new/existing facilities within the next ten years.

- Their ability to forecast growth in student enrollment for the past several years has been excellent (actual enrollment has been within .66% of enrollment projections).
- The Educational Sales Tax is the most effective financial method available to minimize the burden of cost on our citizens.
- While the EST is a new concept to our county, it is not new to other districts within the state. Both Horry County and Aiken County voters overwhelmingly approved similar referenda to address the capital needs in their districts.

Bridgette Frazier

I am not completely against the sale tax refernda, I am currently against this sales tax for only one reason, I believe certain stipulations should be in place, to push the initiative through. The sales tax initiative is indeed one of the methods used to bolster revenue for local funding for the school system to cover capitol building and improvements other factors must be considered first. The current budget that the board oversees is not being dictated in the most optimal way, I believe that until the board shows a greater plan on its current fiscal operation that a sales tax initiative without a clear plan and with too much ambiguity would further enhance public mistrust. Make no mistake about it, however, the sales tax would garner revenue....

Christina Gwozdz

No, I do not support either the 1% sales tax or \$217 million bond referenda for the BCSD on the November 8 ballot. The School Board has not made a convincing argument of the benefits of the sales tax vs bond. Both referenda would exclusively fund the same capital project list. Funds could not be used for instructional programs to improve academic performance. The penny sales tax would be a 16% increase in our sales tax (from 6% to 7%) for a decade. It would hurt low income families (60% of BCSD students). The list does not differentiate projects by their necessity nor by their associated maintenance costs, which is critical information for taxpayers to know prior to any vote.

Answers by District 6 candidates:

Patricia Felton-Montgomery

As an educator with over 40 years of experience, I have been an advocate for the financial support of our schools so that students, teachers, and staff have state-of-the-art facilities capable of supporting academic, personal, and social development programs necessary for success in today's world. Unfortunately, for the first time in my adult voting life, I cannot support the two referenda on the present November 8th ballot. In a district that is short over 200 teachers annually, public support for the referendum would be more justified if the tax increase was for significant improvements in teacher recruitment and retention since the absence of quality

teachers in classrooms across the school system is having a very negative effect on student academic performance. Out of the box solutions.....

Paul Roth

YES. We spend \$400MM a year, have 4,000,000 square feet in 33 schools .3000 employees and a county which is one of the fastest growing in state with more coming. We need a 10 year vision and plan to keep up in a new tech revolution. Only the amateurs say 10 years is too far because we have 13 years of enrollment in front of us and coming our way. It can be financed the easy way with sales taxes or the hard way by borrowing WITH MAJOR TAX INCREASES.

4. The BCSD has been recognized for its efforts to provide high quality early education to its students through its expanded 4K program. What is your vision for early childhood education in the BC schools?

Answers by District 9 candidates:

Christopher Epps

As a father of a four-year-old, the early education programs are very important to me. We need to continue to expand the program to all children. It will give the firm basis for all children to succeed in the education. Also, this will also give a much need a financial break to parents having to pay for childcare while both parents work.

Bill Fletcher

Research data overwhelmingly validates the importance of early childhood education. Identifying and resolving obstacles to academic achievement, particularly in kindergarten through third grade, exponentially increases student achievement in middle school and high school. This is especially important for our minority and low-income students. Smaller class sizes (or reduced Teacher/Student ratio) are optimal environments to ensure our youngest learners are put on the path to academic success. When we talk about "reducing the achievement gap," quality early childhood education plays a fundamental and critical part in reducing that gap. As for my vision, I'd like to see smaller class sizes through the 3rd grade to give our students the best chance to succeed in the classroom, which will pay enormous dividends for their future.

Bridgette Frazier

Early childhood education is instrumental in a child's cognitive development. Children in the younger years are like little sponges in terms of what their brains can absorb. I applaud the district for implementing this initiative. For future plans, I'd love to see the

district apply the multiple intelligences approach and engage our students in their particular learning style. I'd like to see a kinesthetic classroom to suit those who learn in that manner, or a visual classroom. In that regards, we must also understand they are kids; recess should be expanded and not tampered with. There is no limit for what our children can learn if they are taught in right manner.

Christina Gwozdz

We want all children in Beaufort County to enter kindergarten ready to succeed. BCSD offers comprehensive developmental screening including hearing, speech, and vision testing for all children ages 2½ to 5 years old. Parents of children identified as needing early intervention programs and pre-kindergarten placement are offered programs and assistance. All Beaufort County elementary schools and early childhood development centers offer pre-kindergarten programs.

Parental education and family literacy are important components of early childhood education. BCSD offers programs and initiatives to help improve the effectiveness of parents as the primary teachers of their children. Parents must encourage language, intellectual growth and social-emotional skills for their children. I think it is important to continue parental mentoring programs for at-risk children as they progress through school.

Answers by District 6 candidates:

Patricia Felton-Montgomery

The BCSD must be commended for its recent efforts to provide high quality early childhood education to its students. I am proud to say that over a decade ago I also brought 4K education to the school districts in which I served as assistant superintendent in New Jersey. In fact, the early childhood program in one of my school districts was sighted during my tenure as one of the most successful in the whole state of New Jersey. The reason for this success is absent from the present BCSD program; namely use of research-based, proven early childhood curriculum programs. *Creative Curriculum* and *High Scope* are two such programs implemented in the school districts I served that resulted in high indicators of child development including appropriate social, personal.....

Paul Roth

At this point my expertise is running out. There are 11 of us and will defer to those who labor on this. I do support pre k program and even pre pre k if necessary.

5. The BCSD has been working to close the gap in achievement between its African American, Hispanic and White populations. What are your thoughts

about the importance of closing this achievement gap and the steps the BCSD might emphasize locally?

Answers by District 9 candidates:

Christopher Epps

We need to look at our school system for answers to these types of problems. For one, teachers have great insight into areas where we can improve. We need to support and give them tools to be successful in solving issues like this. Since many underachieving students have both parents that are working, they are not able to be as involved in their children's education as well as parents that are more affluent. This issue will only be solved with high paying jobs that come with a stronger school system.

Bill Fletcher

As I outlined in my previous answer, early childhood education is critical in closing the achievement gap. I believe it would be worth the financial investment for BCSD to either reduce class sizes through 3rd grade (15-17 students) or have a Teacher Aid work with each teacher/classroom which will allow for more individualized instruction for our students. Will there be a cost? Absolutely. But if we truly believe the research when it comes to teacher/student ratios, especially as it relates to minority and/or low income families, the investment in our students in those early primary years will undoubtedly help to close the achievement gap.

Bridgette Frazier

Closing the achievement gap is crisis "deemable" at this moment. An achievement gap in the 40 percentile range enforces the abysmal perpetuation of the school to prison pipeline, poverty, and disadvantages. We have got to do better, because that number is even higher when we look at individual schools and their numbers. To curb this we must, recruit more minority teachers male and female, adopt literacy programs that our children can be engaged in and be consistent in terms of literacy adoptions, and program implementation. Hiring effective reading coaches and making literacy a focus on an interdisciplinary level will also be a great start. There's more out there for our struggling readers than Read 180.

Christina Gwozdz

We want ALL children to be well educated so they can succeed later in life. The good news is BCSD has already made some strides in closing the achievement gap as evidenced by improvement in SAT scores from 2012 to 2016. African American students increased their scores by 87 points and whites by 30 points. BCSD now has a

1444 SAT average which is inline with the state average but 9 points below the US average, so more work is needed.

The district is implementing a “100 Voices” program this year. One hundred African American students identified as “nearly proficient” in grades 3-5 will receive additional instruction in an attempt to improve their academic performance. Parental mentoring programs would also be beneficial.

Answers by District 6 candidates:

Patricia Felton-Montgomery

There has been a huge achievement gap between whites and African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans for the last 15 years and so I want to advocate for research-based remedies to close the gap that have not been tried by our district.

First, the district must make closing the achievement gap a district priority. The Beaufort County School District (BCSD) has given lip service to closing the gap but has not established this goal as its major priority, nor has it specifically devoted resources to new administrative actions and instructional strategies to change its trajectory. Second, it has not engaged teachers in strengthening curriculum and student assessments. Third, our educational research is replete with school districts that have successfully closed the achievement gap, with most having taken these steps ...

Paul Roth

The BCSD has made some important progress here in the last 2 years with important improvements in graduation rates and test scores. For the first time ever All high Schools achieved grad rates at 80 % or better, 83% average. Black student MAP test scores have advanced at a greater rate than Whites, but still behind. We are meeting this challenge with a 2 track curriculum, one for the College bound and tech training for high school graduates that want to go on to Jobs with a formal certificate of achievement in skilled areas, working with TCL.

6. Research consistently indicates that effective teachers are an important variable in ensuring a child’s school success. What do you think the BCSD should be doing to recruit and retain the best teachers in the current climate of teacher shortages in SC?

Answers by District 9 candidates:

Christopher Epps

We need to work with the local universities to create an educational pipeline for local teachers. Local talent will be accustom and have support networks to face the unique

challenges that are involved in living in the Lowcountry. To help the teachers that are already here, we need to look at cutting administration costs down and direct the funds to teacher pay.

Bill Fletcher

1. We can make teachers feel VALUED by not only soliciting their input and feedback, but also by incorporating their ideas into policy and program decisions.
2. We can INVEST in our teachers by providing them with opportunities to lead others and experience professional growth. Teachers don't just like to teach, but they also like to learn! More opportunities for growth and learning make our teachers better equipped to teach our students.
3. We must SUPPORT an environment of learning. Our teachers have a tough enough job already without having to put up rebellious, disrespectful, and disruptive students who negatively impact the ability to learn for those around them. Let's make sure our administrators are dealing with these issues, not our teachers!

Bridgette Frazier

If BCSD is serious about retaining the best and quality teachers it must do all of the following: quit inundating teachers with clerical work (SLOs, etc.), rehire hall monitors so that a teacher's planning period can be utilized for; planning, stop placing the burden of a struggling student on the teacher as an individual issue and address it as a collaborative responsibility that requires the involvement of administration, parents and the teacher, pay teachers at a rate which is commensurate with the living wage, and stop telling them to do what their four to eight years of post-secondary, graduate or doctoral program, Praxis I, Praxis II, PLT, SAFE-T, ADEPT, and TAP has already proven they can do...Teach; let them teach and they'll stay.

Christina Gwozdz

I am in favor of increasing teacher salaries to help accomplish this goal. I would first ask the administration to come up with a plan for a minimum teacher salary which increases stepwise from 40K to 50K with as much effort as they put into the sales tax and bond referenda. A teacher salary study group with school district, county legislature and community representatives could determine how the compensation should be structured (longevity bonuses, COLA?) to maximize the goal of keeping quality teachers in Beaufort County classrooms. If done right, it would likely gain overwhelming public support.

Research also shows that great teachers are made so we should focus on improving and retaining teachers already committed to the Lowcountry.

<http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21700383-what-matters-schools-teachers-fortunately-teaching-can-be-taught-how-make-good>

Answers by District 6 candidates:

Patricia Felton-Montgomery

The answer lies in increasing teacher pay. On average, teachers in the U.S. make a little more than \$57,000 a year. Our state's teachers earn 86% of the national average which places us 39th in the country according to the SCEA (Greenville Online, October 2014). The range of teacher salaries in Beaufort County is from about \$34,467 for beginning teachers to \$50,034 at the top of the range. But, meeting the cost of living in Beaufort County would mean at least a 10% increase in teacher salaries. In its last session, the state increased teacher salaries by two percent for the upcoming school year. The district must take the lead in forming coalitions with other school districts in the state to aggressively lobby.....

Paul Roth

Here again I have no clear solution against the headwinds we are facing. WE have upped starting salaries and professional training. And we have been aggressive and more selective in recruitment. We can only try harder.