

MEMPHIS SCHOOL BOARD QUESTIONNAIRE 2008

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Describe briefly your qualifications for holding the office of Memphis School board member. (Please answer in the space below, but you may also attach a resume or other description to provide us with additional detail.)

I am qualified to run for this position because of my experiences as a career educator along with the knowledge and understanding gained as a result of my current role of Memphis City Schools (MCS) At-Large Position 1 Board Commissioner. I was appointed to fill this unexpired term because of my reputation as an excellent educator and the perspective from institutional memory that I add to the Board. My experiences with Memphis City Schools include positions as classroom teacher, Educational Resource Specialist for Technology, School Reform Coordinator, No Child Left Behind Professional Development Coordinator and MCS Professional Development Director. In addition to Memphis City Schools' experiences, I have taught at several local institutions of higher education, including University of Memphis, Christian Brothers University and LeMoyné-Owen College. In my present employment with Walden University, I work with educators who are seeking their doctorate degree in education. I value the perspective of classroom teachers and administrators that I gain through this role.

The Office of City School Board, At-Large Position 1 is extremely complex because of the requirement to make connections to all of the schools within the district. My experiences as district-wide administrator afforded me opportunities to work with school personnel and parents across the city. I understand the unique culture of schools within the district and can relate to school staff, parents and citizens of the various school communities.

Finally, I am qualified to run for this position because I am willing to invest the interest and time to improve the City of Memphis through contributions of leadership to Memphis City Schools. Our public school system is a valuable asset that needs the leadership of qualified professionals. I am a proven educational leader who possesses the character and temperament required for success in the Office of City School Board, At-Large Position 1.

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NAME: DR. FREDA WILLIAMS

2. In your opinion, what are the three greatest issues (challenges or opportunities) facing the Memphis City School System in the next four years; and what policy changes, if any, would you recommend in dealing with these issues?

Our foremost priority should be securing adequate funding so that we can offer the highest quality education possible to our students. The present fiscal situation is counterproductive to the design and delivery of effective instructional programs. Without adequate funding, we cannot afford personnel and materials that are associated with high performing districts. My recommendation is that Memphis City Schools continue to seek identification of appropriate local funding.

Secondly, we should focus on collaborating with external partners to work toward elimination of barriers that prevent students from performing at optimum levels. Many of our students are considered at-risk and while this does not mean that they cannot learn at high levels, it does recognize that they experience challenges that can inhibit successful school performance. These challenges cannot be successfully addressed by the school system alone. It will take collaborative efforts to generate effective solutions. I recommend the design of policy that requires each school to develop a School-Based Leadership Council with membership consisting of school administrators, parents, teachers and school community members. The purpose of this council will be to provide collaboration of stakeholders on school-related issues.

Once we address the two previously mentioned issues, MCS will be better positioned to address the third issue: the delivery of high quality instruction and continued generation of student performance that is at grade level and above. My recommendation for this challenge would involve the drafting of policy that would require the ongoing evaluation of instructional programs that Memphis City Schools implements. Many programs generate effective results while others produce marginal results at best. The ongoing evaluation of programs would ensure that less effective ones are removed from the district.

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2. Was a Board member, what policies would you support to address the issues of school safety and violence prevention?

I am not sure that additional policies are required. There are a number of existing policies that address the issues of school safety and violence prevention. My strongest recommendation is that district staff consistently implements policies and universally applies the Student Codes of Conduct guidelines. Violence prevention can be implemented in a number of ways, including strategies such as ***“Listening to Student Voices”*** which offers opportunities for students to be heard. Oftentimes violence can be prevented by providing stress outlets for students.

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4. Define the role of the School Board in leading the Memphis City School System, and what is that role in relationship to the role of the Superintendent?

The role of the School Board in leading Memphis City Schools can be summed up by one word – governance. The School Board has the responsibility to hire the Superintendent, ensure a viable instructional program and set an appropriate budget for implementation of the instructional program. School Board leadership for Memphis City Schools is visible through the establishment of policies that set guidelines for staff and students. In terms of its role in the relationship to the role of the Superintendent, the Board has the responsibility to hold the Superintendent accountable to ensure that policies are followed, to generate acceptable student achievement and the for development and maintenance of community relationships to support district efforts. The Board holds the Superintendent accountable for the management of Memphis City Schools.

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5. Are there opportunities that could be pursued for collaboration between the Memphis City School System and the Shelby County School System? If so, what are they?

Memphis City Schools and Shelby Count Schools can partner in several ways:

- Collaboration on the Legislative Agenda - This combined effort can generate changes in state legislation that would benefit both districts.
- Collaboration on Professional Development – Both districts are required to provide professional development for teachers and other staff. Oftentimes the topics are the same, especially for those that are state-mandated.
- Collaboration on Purchasing – There are common materials that both districts purchase. It is possible to get a better price if the districts collaborate on purchases.

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6. An educated workforce is one of the key factors that companies consider when evaluating a city for a new operation. What measures should the Memphis City Schools address in order to prepare its high school graduates for the workforce and/or college?

One major strategy that Memphis City Schools could employ is to begin conversations with students about life after high school at an earlier age. It is common for guidance counselors to work with high school seniors on completing college admission applications. They also begin to seek scholarships for seniors. These activities should begin much earlier. Once students reach middle school, they should be engaged in conversations about life after high school. We should help them to understand that they should begin to prepare for high school graduation while in middle school. These conversations should also include parents. If parents and students began to prepare for college at an earlier time, we could increase the number of students who are admitted and graduate from college.

In terms of preparing students for the workforce immediately after high school, there are many programs that can be initiated to get high school students job-ready upon graduation. The Memphis City Schools Career and Technology Centers should be improved and expanded to include more programs that are aligned with regional employment needs. Programs such as cosmetology, construction, landscape design, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and computer training can prepare students for employment immediately after high school graduation.

Dual enrollment programs provide opportunities for students to earn college credits while still in high school. This initiative makes it possible for students to reduce the amount of time required to graduate from college. There are many students who are enrolled in dual enrollment and are taking college classes along with their high school required classes. This program will increase the number of high school students who successfully complete college.

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7. Merit pay for teachers is a major topic of discussion nationally. What are your views on differentiating pay for teachers?

Educational research identifies teacher effect as one of the most important variables in student achievement. I support differentiating pay for teachers but only if it is based on students' academic growth during the time the teacher had instructional responsibilities for those students. With student abilities being so diverse, student academic growth serves as a uniformed strategy to determine teacher effect.

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8. What initiatives do you propose to establish positive, cooperative communication with the funding bodies regarding school funding?

My first recommendation is that budget talks begin very early in the school year. This strategy provides opportunities for the submission of questions and answers that will be used to guide funding. I also propose zero-based budgeting to ensure that all requests are based on need as identified through data. Finally, it is important that all parties have common understanding of funding requirements as established by state and local guidelines.

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9. Optional schools have the very positive reputation for high quality education. How do we ensure the same educational standard for all students.

We ensure 'optional school standards' for all students through the creation of a culture of excellence. As we begin to understand that all students should be educated to their full potential, we will work toward higher educational standards for all students. In addition to the creation of a culture of excellence within schools, we will need the same level of parental support for all students that we see displayed in optional schools.