

MEMPHIS SCHOOL BOARD QUESTIONNAIRE 2008

NAME: PATRICE J. ROBINSON

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 highly qualified to serve as a member of the Memphis City Schools Board of Education. I have served two terms with integrity as the "Voice of Reason." During my tenure, I was selected by my peers to serve as the president of the Board in 2004 and 2007 and graduated from Leadership Memphis, class of 2006. The Tennessee School Boards Association (TSBA) designated me as a "Master School Boardman" with only approximately 50 others in the State of Tennessee. I currently serve on the TSBA Board of Directors representing not only Memphis but West Tennessee. The law requires that I reside in my district and be a registered voter for 5 years. I meet that criteria as well. It is my endeavor during this term to serve with a determination to reform our school district into a school system of choice in the best interest of our children, community and city!

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?

I believe that the three greatest issues facing MCS over the next four years are as follows:

- i. Educational Funding
- ii. Increased State Standards and Graduation Requirements
- iii. Public Perception and Community Involvement

Educational funding is a very complicated issue. I believe that it is the responsibility of the Board through its staff, Dr. Kriner Cash, to provide the community with a well communicated 4-5 year projected budget with the cost of living adjustments as well as efficiencies spelled out for greater accountability. There should be no surprises and the taxpayers should be well informed and prepared for increases/decreases as needed of their tax rate. This action only requires the will of the Board (majority vote). Additionally, I believe that the Board should be responsible for setting/collecting the educational tax rate. This can only be accomplished by action of the state legislators. We have included this item in our legislative agenda.

Increased State Standards will require additional resources, commitment, and support. As a Board, it is our responsibility to advocate for public education, approve the budget and govern through policies. In this case, as a Board we need to review our policies as it relates to the changes needed to accomplish the activities required to provide the kind of learning environment needed for our students to prepare and perform on State standardized tests.

Last, but not least, our public perception is at an all time low. I believe through the development and careful review of our Balanced Scorecard and increased student achievement a better perception will be attained. However, we can not

MEMPHIS SCHOOL BOARD QUESTIONNAIRE 2008

NAME: PATRICE J. ROBINSON

please everyone, all of the time. We, the school district, can do a better job of sharing our numerous successes!

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

We currently have well thought out policies on school safety and violence prevention and are reviewing them every year as required by law. However, I believe that we need to create a policy to establish an alternative program for students that alternative schools are not meeting their needs. I will ask for a feasibility study for a military style charter school to meet the needs of these students rather than returning them to the regular classroom and placing other students at risk.

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 Board is to look out for students. "Education is not a line item on the school board's agenda—it is the only item." School boards are the education watchdog for their communities, ensuring that students get the best education for the tax dollars spent. I believe that the role of the Memphis City School Board in leading the District is to focus on student achievement—our core business; allocate resources equitably; ask appropriate questions about the services that we are providing to which students at what cost and resulting in what benefits; use data to make decisions; and find ways to engage the community especially parent and patron involvement.

The Board's relationship with the superintendent should be one of collaboration, cooperation, and consensus building. State law defines our roles as follows:

- Board hires the superintendent
- Board sets the priorities and adopts the budget
- Board sets the goals for student achievement and evaluates the progress
- Board decides how school boundaries are drawn and whether schools are built
- Board approves purchases based on state, local, and district policies
- Superintendent is responsible for the daily operations
- Superintendent by law is responsible for all personnel actions

All of this is done with the recommendations of the superintendent.

MEMPHIS SCHOOL BOARD QUESTIONNAIRE 2008

NAME: PATRICE J. ROBINSON

4. 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?

In 2004, the Board collaborated with Shelby County Schools and produced a report on several areas of operation that we thought we could gain some efficiency. However, the task force found no actual savings by either system. Since then we have joined the five largest districts in the State to leverage our funding concerns on a state level. Additionally, we work together on annexations as it relates to facilities and student access to schools. I believe we could work together to set a tax rate for education knowing that the devil will be in the details.

5. 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?

Student achievement is our #1 goal. This includes preparation for post secondary training and school to work transition. I believe we should evaluate our careers and technology division as well as how we prepare students for post secondary training. The Board should focus on the what and the superintendent focuses on the how. Additionally, the Board should define in its goals, values, and policies what direction the Direction we believe the District should be moving in. The Board is now participating in the Reform Governance in Action program to further clarify and develop policies to make these kinds of changes a reality.

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

I believe in pay for performance. I am in agreement that to recruit and retain the best educators, we must investigate and implement a program that will support our goals for the District that provides differentiated pay for teachers.

MEMPHIS SCHOOL BOARD QUESTIONNAIRE 2008

NAME: PATRICE J. ROBINSON

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

I have been coordinating with the Board and the State an opportunity to bring all of the elected bodies together for Educational Finance 101 to continue the dialogue on educational funding with factual data and information. This meeting will be an after-hours workshop with dinner. Then, we will engage a facilitator to assist us with the brain-storming and formulation of ideas on how we as a team can creatively address our funding issues. Additionally, I believe that the superintendent should prepare a 4-5 year funding plan and share this plan with the community.

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

We can ensure the same educational standard for all students by expanding our optional programs to all the new regions in the school system based on interest of those communities. This will require additional funding but will provide equitable access to optional programs.