

# Coalition for a Better Memphis Candidate Questionnaire Shelby County School Board

The Coalition for a Better Memphis is an independent non-profit organization, made up of Shelby County individuals, businesses and organizations. Its mission is to assist area voters in identifying qualified candidates for public office.

In 2008, CBM's Candidate Assessment Committee is interviewing candidates for the Shelby County School Board with the intention of publishing a "voter guide" of candidate evaluations.

Completed questionnaires may be emailed to: [peggy@bettermemphis.org](mailto:peggy@bettermemphis.org)  
Or Mailed to:

**Coalition for a Better Memphis  
7730 Goshawk Cove  
Cordova, TN 38016**

Direct any questions to:  
Peggy Callahan  
[peggy@bettermemphis.org](mailto:peggy@bettermemphis.org)

Please complete this questionnaire and  
return it to

The Coalition for a Better Memphis

**No later than 5 p.m.,**  
**Friday, June 6, 2008**

*Please answer all questions carefully – your responses will be printed on the  
CBM website EXACTLY as they are provided to us.*

SHELBY COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD QUESTIONNAIRE 2008

NAME: MIKE WISSMAN

1. In your opinion, what are the three greatest issues (problems or opportunities) facing the Shelby County School system in the next four years?

1. Funding is always going to be an issue. We have to find ways to maintain and increase funding for schools without raising taxes. Shelby County Schools excel even with the funding being below the state and national average per pupil. With more funding, we can improve all areas of the educational system for both teachers and students.
2. We need to freeze the boundaries between the City and County. More people are leaving Shelby County because they are scared of a merge between the two systems.
3. We need to find a way to improve teacher benefits. In order for Shelby County to continue to recruit and maintain great teachers, we need to be able to offer them a benefits package that will be up to national averages. Retirement and insurance benefits need to be a focal point.

2. Describe briefly your qualifications for holding the office of Shelby County School Board member.

Since the fall of 2006, I have been attending the school board meetings on a regular basis. I feel this sets me apart from my opponents due to the fact I am aware of the current issues and how the board operates. I understand that the board must work as a group in order to be successful, no matter what their individual opinions may be. The concern needs to be focused on the children and the learning environment.

Since I grew up in the County school system, I'm very familiar with it's history. I regularly attend school activities throughout District 2 and talk with parents about issues they and their children face daily. I am in contact with board members and community leaders regarding issues that directly affect schools in their area. As a concerned citizen and parent I feel my efforts in the community, as well as my educational and work background, provide me with the tools to help maintain the current success of the school board.

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3. What do you think is the primary role of the School Board in leading the Shelby County School System, and what is the primary role of the superintendent?

The role of the school board is to provide the administration with the necessary tools for the system to work properly. Each board member is the voice for their district, and as a group they must address the issues as to how they affect the entire school system. Budgets, policies, and other school related issues are voted on in the best interest of educating our children and giving them an opportunity for achievement.

The superintendent is responsible for the overall operations of every school in the system. It is his/her job to provide qualified staffing and execute the necessary procedures for our students to have a quality atmosphere in order to learn.

4. School construction costs have been a major contributor to the county government's debt load. What, if anything, should the Shelby County School Board do in the years ahead to help the county avoid adding to the debt?

I think the board is on the right path with a unified construction code. Utilizing similar construction plans, such as they did for Arlington High and Southwind High, can help keep costs down. Our contractors need to be reviewed by past performance, not necessarily by the lowest bid or minority participation. Sometimes we have the mentality that cheaper is better for our government, but it ends up costing us more money in the end due to poor quality. It is an area that we will always have to keep a close eye on, but I feel the board is addressing the issue the proactively.

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4. Raising student achievement is a critical mission for the school system. If you could implement only one initiative, enhancement or management change, to raise student achievement in the Shelby County schools in the next four years, what would it be?

Enhancement. The County school system works, as evident of the Tennessee Report Card and the number of scholarships offered each year to graduating seniors. If we can continue to improve our technology and recruitment of quality teachers, it will trickle down to our children's education.

5. Are there opportunities for collaboration between the Shelby County School System and the Memphis School System that aren't being pursued today? If so, what are two that you would favor?

My understanding is that a couple of years ago the two systems collaborated on how to save money across the board, and they are still communicating to discuss cost saving options today.

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6. How would you propose the Shelby County School system cooperate and comply with the current court order to achieve unitary status?

I feel the board complies with the guidelines provided in the court order. Even though they may be opposed to the ruling, the board has to let the legal process take its course.

8. What is your position on Special School District status?

I support the legislation for Special School Districts. The School Board is best informed of the budgetary needs of the system, and empowering them to make decisions on how the money is spent and earned makes logical sense. This could enable local areas where schools are located to help allocate additional funds specifically for the schools in their neighborhoods, giving the community more of a say in how their schools are funded.

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9. As a public servant, how do you propose to be accessible to the people you represent?

You have to remember how you were voted into office, and that is by the people you represent. I will be available at local area activities and the use of mobile phones and email make communication readily available. In order to serve, you have to be willing to listen and communicate.

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