

COALITION FOR A BETTER MEMPHIS
Shelby County School Board Candidate Questionnaire
Election Date: August 5, 2010

Name: Dr. Snowden "Butch" Carruthers

District for which you are running: 1

Section 1: Qualifications and Background (2 questions)

Section 2: Vision and Strategies (5 questions)

Section 3: Improving the Education System (4 questions)

1. QUALIFICATIONS AND BACKGROUND

A. Describe your qualifications for holding the office of Shelby County School District board member. (Please answer in the space below and attach a resume.)

I have been a lifelong resident in District 1 of the Shelby County Board of Education. I feel I know the people, the area, and many of the needs of the various communities in District 1. I have the educational preparation needed to serve with an undergraduate degree in Business Administration(B.S.) and graduate degrees in Educational Administration and Supervision(M.S.) and Curriculum and Instruction(Ed.D.). I am an experienced school administrator with 40 years experience of which 34 were in administrative positions. I have served as an administrator at all levels of the schools. It was my responsibility to administer both school funds and those appropriated for the instructional programs by the board of education. I have supervised staffs of over 200 administrators, teachers, clerical, cafeteria and custodial staffs, and transportation personnel.

B. Please indicate whether you or any close family member has any direct or indirect financial or material interest in firms, corporations or organizations doing business with the Shelby County School District, Memphis City Schools, local City, County or State governments

None

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2. VISION AND STRATEGIES

A. What are the three greatest issues (challenges or opportunities) facing the Shelby County School District in the next four years. What policy changes, if any, would you recommend in dealing with these issues?

- 1. There must be a solution to the funding issues that seem to be a yearly battle with the local funding agencies. Whether this solution is a Special School District, Single Source Funding, or Special Taxing Authority, I am not sure. There needs to be a solution that most stakeholders can agree upon. As a Board of Education member I would work to find the best solution.**
- 2. School Boundary Changes and Reassignment of Students is always a volatile issue. With finances as tight as they are, it seems pretty obvious that few new schools will be built. Therefore, boundaries and reassignment will certainly be examined in 2010-11 and put into effect in 2011-12 to attempt to relieve overcrowding and equalize student populations without new construction.**
- 3. There is a great amount of controversy and misinformation over the Special School District legislation before the state legislature. There must be better information channeled to the public, if support for this legislation is to be increased. It might be of service to hold community meetings to better educate the general public concerning this legislation and enhance support.**

B. What policies would you support to address the issues of school safety and violence prevention?

- 1. Continue a strong emphasis on Zero Tolerance for Weapons and Drugs**
- 2. Enforcement of policies concerning Harassment (physical, verbal, sexual, etc.)**
- 3. Special schools or classes away from the general school population for habitual disciplinary offenders**
- 4. Behavioral counseling for students who are identified as at risk of committing violent acts or those affected by the actions of another student**

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5. Specialized training for faculty, substitute teachers, bus drivers, and support personnel on what to look for, how to deal with, and how to prevent and diffuse student violence
6. Policies to help faculty and staff feel secure in their school environment

C. What opportunities exist to improve/increase collaboration between the Shelby County School District and the Memphis City School District?
If mutual problems area for both systems could be identified, then perhaps dialogue could begin to seek mutually identifiable solutions to these problem areas. For this dialogue to begin, a third party, individual, group, or organization that is well respected by both school systems must step forward to initiate discussion. With the present divisions in governmental agencies, political party agendas, city and county differences, different school board priorities, and racial divisions at all these levels, I am not sure this will happen in the near future and schools will continue to suffer. City and county leadership must step forward to initiate this dialogue.

D. Do you support single-source funding for the Memphis and Shelby County School Districts? (Circle one) Yes Yes with reservations No
Explain: It appears that none of the governing bodies involved can come up with a plan which can be agreed upon by all parties. While I need more information on all the changes this would bring about, I am concerned that it would increase taxes for county residents outside Memphis corporate limits and these increases would be used to make up for the Memphis taxes that had previously been designated for education. I am not sure this would benefit Shelby County students. However, I am open to listening to the plans that are to be brought forward before settling on a final decision.

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E. An educated workforce and successful entrepreneurs are key considerations when companies evaluate a city for a new location. What should Shelby County schools be doing to better prepare graduates for the workforce, as entrepreneurs, and/or college?

There must be in-depth discussions between all stakeholders in this question. School leaders, business leaders, and governmental representatives must seek information as to the type of graduate that is needed in the Memphis area workforce at the present time and in the future. Once these determinations have been made, local school and college curriculum must be addressed, counseling must be done to prepare student for these needs, business leaders should be informed of the results of these studies, and things such as personal values and work ethic must be addressed.

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3. IMPROVING THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

A. What is the single greatest challenge facing schools in the particular district you are running for? What specific policy would you propose to resolve it?
In Shelby County Schools District 1, there is a feeling among its constituents that all the schools in North Shelby County have been for many years overlooked and often looked down upon when it comes to new and updated facilities that rival the newly developed areas of Shelby County. While this may sometimes be a perception more than a reality, the feeling seems to permeate the area. As an administrator with over twenty-five years experience in District 1 of my forty years in Shelby County, I have experienced this first hand and have felt left out on a number of occasions when facilities in other areas of the county were updated and my requests were not addressed. The answer was usually, "We don't have the money". This feeling cannot be address by a specific policy. It can only be solved by a commitment from the Board of Education to take action to address this perception, and the needs and concerns of the parents, students, and governmental agencies in District 1. A step in the right direction was recently made with the new master plan for Millington H.S.; however, there are five elementary schools, two middle schools, and another high school should receive the same attention.

B. Merit pay for teachers is a major topic of discussion nationally. Do you support differentiating pay for teachers?

(Circle one) Yes Yes with reservations No

Explain: Many factors must be taken into consideration when you differentiate pay for educators. The Race To The Top is using 50% test scores as a component of teacher evaluations. Is this realistic since students don't usually come in neat groups with similar abilities? Beginning and ending levels of student achievement must be taken into consideration. It is quite obvious that a teacher will probably have a class with many different levels, backgrounds, abilities, and support at home. If items such as this can be addressed, then certainly a teacher should be rewarded if he/she can make gains in the student's achievement levels. If consideration is not given to these things, then I don't see how a teacher's effectiveness can be evaluated and merit pay cannot be fair. I'm afraid that most programs that use student achievement for teacher evaluations and merit pay, don't consider these things. There is too much emphasis on test scores.

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C. Do you believe that test scores should be a factor in determining whether teachers obtain tenure? (Circle one) Yes Yes with reservations No

Explain: This should be only one of the factors used in the teacher evaluation process to determine if a teacher receives tenure. Many other factors should be considered when a teacher is granted tenure. There should be administrative observations, exemplary teacher consultations, mentors assigned to help new teachers or those with minor problems, consideration of how well the teacher follows instructions, instructional skills, disciplinary skills, and cooperation with fellow teachers and administrators.

D. As the CEO of the Board of Education, the school district superintendent plays a crucial role in educating Shelby County's children. What in your opinion is the best way to evaluate a superintendent's performance?

The Board of Education should have a well defined job description and a set of performance expectations for the Superintendent when he is hired and signs a contract. These should be covered during interviews prior to hiring. The criteria in his job description and performance expectations should be used as the primary items upon which the evaluation is based. Included in these criteria should be his job performance, financial management, staff management, planning, relations with the teacher representatives, ability to work with funding agencies and the Board of Education members, and the image as a leader that he/she presents to the school community.

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