

 **QEP Evaluates the Candidates**

The November 3, 2020 election gives Charleston County voters the opportunity to elect candidates who will work on the major issues facing the quality of public education. As a research-based organization that seeks to work with communities that have been historically disenfranchised, the Quality Education Project (QEP) has identified the issues surrounding school choice, commitment to students of color, and effectiveness in enacting fundamental change as paramount concerns to our community.

In compiling these narratives, QEP has highlighted experience in public education, political acumen, and involvement with community-based organizations as important considerations in selecting school board members. QEP wants to raise questions and focus on the issues that impact the status of quality public education in Charleston County. All Charleston County voters will elect the five open seats on the Consolidated Board. The candidates run by “district,” but they are elected county-wide. There are four CCSD districts from which school board members are chosen to run. Three districts have open seats in this election.

**CITY OF CHARLESTON – DISTRICT 2 (you may vote for 1 candidate)**

**Lee J Bennett** is a candidate for a City of Charleston seat on the consolidated board. He was born and raised in Charleston, South Carolina. He is the fifth of 6 children and was educated in the local public schools, graduating from Burke High School. He attended Virginia Union University and received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and History and Government. He has more than forty years of managerial and leadership experience in complex and diverse organizations, including working in the Executive Office of the President. He was Deputy Chief of Staff of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, with responsibilities that included initiating and implementing programs to manage a $461 million budget. He believes that communication, operations and academic achievement are the top challenges facing the district. In order to address racial disparity within the district, Bennett believes that equity and fairness must be embedded in the district culture. While in support of community partnerships, Bennett is skeptical about third party school takeovers. He is also in support of the policies CCSD has in place for discipline and safe schools. He would also like to see counselors and social workers on site, and training for educators to reduce turnover. In order to better respond to future pandemics, Bennett believes that we should have high-speed internet available for all students, and while not a believer in online learning, he does not think that teachers should be engaged in hybrid or dual teaching - online and in person.

**Regina Duggins** is a candidate for one of the open seats representing the City of Charleston on the consolidated school board. She has made being a tireless voice for the voiceless a lifelong mission. As a founder of Charleston Black Pride, Ms. Duggins wants to extend her advocacy efforts for the LGBTQ community to the area of education to improve local public schools for all students in the Lowcountry. As an Associate Reading Teacher for the Charleston County School District (CCSD) and Constituent Board Member for District 20 (Downtown Charleston), she would bring valuable experience to the school board in regard to decision-making. Duggins is a strong advocate for investing in traditional public education and the pursuit of best practice models for improving public education such as developing and supporting community schools. She supports equitable education for all students and is a proponent for increasing teachers’ pay. Duggins is one of five candidates to be publicly endorsed by The Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce Political Action Committee (PAC).

**Lauren Herterich** isa committed citizen with a zeal for school improvement and a candidate for an open seat representing the City of Charleston. She has faithfully served the Charleston area as the Director of Kids on Point, a non-profit that offers year-round academic, athletic and enrichment programming to students from under-resourced neighborhoods. Criticisms of this program include lax academic content and trivial athletic pursuits like squash while cutting ties with civil rights-based quality education programming. Mrs. Herterich is committed to equitable access, funding, and opportunity for students of color across the district. She supported common business practices and supports school choice policies but is committed to making them as fair and open as possible. As a Charleston Coalition for Kids candidate, her candidacy is implicated in the use of dark money, privatizing schools, and undermining the professional education of teachers. Research conducted nationally by scholars Raynard Sanders, Steve Suitts, Diane Ravitch, and others affiliated with Journey for Justice and the Network for Public Education have critically questioned the effectiveness of the reform and politics associated with her candidacy. Though invited to share her views with the public, Mrs. Herterich did not participate in the coalition-supported and grassroots-based school board forum held by Student Voice, the Quality Education Project, and the SCEA.

**Tony Lewis** is a pastConstituent School Board member for District 20 and is currently a candidate for the open seat representing the City of Charleston on the consolidated school board. Mr. Lewis brings a passion to educational reform for all “young scholars,” particularly those who have been historically disenfranchised in Charleston County. He has a deep commitment to the local community and has a long track record of working with grassroots and “bottom up” initiatives to improve education. Mr. Lewis demonstrates a passionate commitment to reform and takes a critical stance against choice and charter schools, further believing that district arrangements with private operators like Meeting Street Academy should be more transparent. He advocates for some charters but has adamantly opposed the proposal to convert Burke into a charter school. He supports the use of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports and restorative practices in schools to lower suspensions and arrest rates. Mr. Lewis completed the QEP Candidate Questionnaire and participated in the School Board Forum.

**NORTH CHARLESTON – DISTRICT 4 (you may vote for a maximum of 2 candidates)**

**Rev. Chris Collins** is an incumbentschool board member seeking re-election for a seat on the consolidated board representing North Charleston, Rev. Collins participated in the QEP School Board Candidate Forum. He works with the Old North Charleston Neighborhood Association, the Child in Crisis Fund, Citizen Advisory Club, and the SC Coalition for Voter Participation. He has taken a critical stance about the district’s governance of schools, writing that “Our school district has great potential to educate all students equally, but it just seems like there are not enough board members willing to hold the superintendent accountable. Some board members refuse to represent the families and teachers that need them most.” He has also protested the district’s inadequacy in dealing with racial equity. He believes in supporting children and their families and actively seeks opportunities to meet with constituents. Rev. Collins does not believe that school choice has improved education in Charleston and charters are not the solution, but he believes schools should be run like a business. During his tenure on the CCSD School Board, Rev. Collins has often “stood in opposition” to decisions – such as renewing the transportation contract and the closing of Lincoln High School in McClellanville. As a board member, he supported the use of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports and restorative practices in schools to lower suspensions and arrest rates.

**Dr. Kristen French** is a candidate for one of the open seats representing North Charleston. She holds her professional degree in Molecular Pharmacology. As a parent of two teenagers she understands the dilemma parents face in choosing a school that meets the educational needs children. In her responses to surveys sponsored by the Quality Education Project and the League of Women Voters, she stresses the importance of neighborhood schools using a community models approach and not a top down or business model. Dr. French states that “although choice schools have created quality programs for some students, they have not addressed the opportunity gap which exists across the district.” Dr. French favors repealing Act 338 and pledges to work with legislators on this and other equity issues. Dr. French opposes the Charleston Coalition for Kids attempts to control the school board and policy. She opposes the use of third-party organizations to operate public schools. With regard to school safety and discipline, Dr. French states School Resource Officers (SROs) should be well-trained and schools should determine their needs. She states the CCSD’s Progressive Discipline Policy (PDP) is problematic, believing that discipline should be addressed as part of the development of the emotional, social, and mental health of the child. Over the years, she has spent 5-30 hours per month volunteering at schools, including through PTAs/SICs and QEP. As a school board member, she plans to communicate with schools to better understand their needs. With respect to the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic she lists many solutions including: teacher training for virtual learning, protocols for ill students and teachers, partnerships with health care providers and clinics, and better communication with families.

**Kevin Hollinshead** is an incumbentschool board member seeking re-election in North Charleston. Mr. Hollinshead participated in the QEP School Board Candidate Forum. He has prior experience serving on a governing board (Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission). Mr. Hollinshead has deep roots in the local community and is deeply committed to serving the community by improving public schools, which includes advocating for more workforce training for students. He also stood up for his constituents and protested the district’s inadequacy in dealing with racial equity. He also believes in supporting children and their families and actively seeks opportunities to meet with constituents. At the same time, Mr. Hollinshead believes that education is an extension of the marketplace, that schools should be run like a business, and that more charters and school choice can improve public schools. Though these are principles that potentially align with some privatization initiatives, he supports greater transparency and funding for public schools but not so far as to support repealing Act 388. He also believes that School Resource Officers (SROs) should remain in the schools.

**Charles Monteith** is a candidate for one of the North Charleston seats on the Charleston County Consolidated School Board. He believes that a well-functioning board is an important part of assuring that students are prepared to successfully contribute to society. He brings valuable experience to the race having served from 2014 to 2018 as a member and Vice Chair of the District 4 (North Charleston) Constituent School Board. Monteith was also selected to participate on CCSD’s strategic planning committee. He contends that his ultimate goal is to have CCSD’s success serve as a blueprint for other school districts across the state and nation that face similar challenges. He is supported by the dark money group Charleston Coalition for Kids and previously advocated for a full Montessori School option for North Charleston. Although he contends that as a board member he would be open to working with community groups or organizations concerned with improving education for the Lowcountry, he has not shown that openness as a candidate. Monteith supports giving teachers and administrators more autonomy in deciding what instructional strategies they believe would be effective along with greater access to professional development focused on linking cultural context to teaching.

**Courtney Waters** is a candidate for one of the open North Charleston seats on the consolidated school board.A committed citizen with a zeal for school improvement, she has a track record that demonstrates a firm commitment to her community and all children in the district. Mrs. Waters has based her campaign around the issues of placing Children at the Center of reform, restorative justice in schools, urgency, and supporting and developing culturally competent leaders. She is an executive for Teach for America. Her plans for reform favor school choice and privatization. As a Charleston Coalition for Kids candidate with deep ties to Teach for America, her candidacy is implicated in the use of dark money, privatizing schools, and undermining the professional education of teachers. This undermines attempts for grassroots, empowering, and equitable reform. Mrs. Waters did not complete the QEP questionnaire. Though invited to share her views with the public, she also refused to participate in the coalition-supported and grassroots-based school board forum held by Student Voice, the Quality Education Project, and the SCEA.

**WEST ASHLEY – DISTRICT 3 (you may vote for a maximum of 2 candidates)**

**Francis Marion Beylotte** is a candidate for one of the West Ashley seats on the consolidated board. He is a parent and local health professional at the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) who is well versed on the critical issues effecting public education in the Lowcountry. Beylotte believes that schools are the most important institutions in our community. He is a firm believer that the needs of parents and educators should be front and center by making decisions and embraces embrace this parent and teacher-centered philosophy of leadership as a member of the Charleston County School Board. Beylotte is a strong advocate for investing in traditional public education as opposed to privatizing schools and, as such, is opposed to the charter school movement. He is against bringing in third party entities to run schools because he is concerned about the potential lack of transparency in these instances. He is an advocate for developing community schools and is against closing schools in minority communities that are a part of the institutional fabric of those communities. Beylotte has been a tireless advocate for improving the quality of public education for all students and has been actively engaged in discussions with local leaders concerning improving public education.

**Erica Cokley** is running for one of the open seats on the consolidated board representing West Ashley. She is a mother of three CCSD students; two are currently enrolled in CCSD schools. As a parent she knows the challenge of educating one child with an IEP (individual educational plan) within the public school system and will be able to help formulate policies and best practices to help other children with similar educational needs. She understands the need to have children educated for college and career readiness, however, for Ms. Cokley, that does not mean schools need to be operated like a business. As someone who values community input for schools, she will work to ensure neighborhood schools have functioning School Improvement Councils and Title 1 Councils. She supports having local, neighborhood schools as a path for positive academic reform without having the district create more charter, public-private and/or magnet schools and the district should not be entertaining ideas to privately operate the schools. Besides addressing academics, she believes schools should create an environment where students feel safe and develop a love of learning. She supports recognizing and appreciating teachers and respects teachers having a voice in educating children. School funding is an issue and Act 388 needs to be repealed. As a mother she believes resources and funding have been and are being poorly allocated and children’s other critical needs aren’t being met. She participated in the CCSD Mission Critical Meetings and felt more transparency from the current school board members was needed, along with better neighborhood schools and more racial and gender diversity among teachers and educational staff. Discipline is important and plans are being created and mandated without the consent of the majority of parents in the schools. Ms. Cokley recognizes School Resource Officers (SROs) are not the first line of defense to address discipline problems in schools; other resources and plans are needed. Ms. Cokley thinks the pandemic has been poorly handled and there is a fragile level of trust between parents and the district administration.

**Chris Fraser** is an incumbent candidate currently representing West Ashley. Fraser was appointed in March 2019 to fill a vacancy left by Michael Miller who resigned from the board in 2018. Fraser previously served on the Charleston County School Board from 2008 to 2014. Although he states that he believes in maintaining a strong fiscal record by balancing budgets, he served on the board at a time when there was an 18-million-dollar shortfall. Fraser brings a business background to the board as a commercial real estate broker and is supported by the Charleston Coalition for Kids, a dark money group known for its support of approaches to school reform that are predicated upon business models emphasizing efficiency and privatization. He has been supportive of increasing teacher pay and providing them with more professional development. Fraser recently voted against raising school board pay as he contends helping kids and families is a volunteer community service. He argues that money should be allocated to classrooms and students.

**Dr. Helen Frazier** is a candidate for one of the open seats on the consolidated board for West Ashley. Dr. Frazier has served on the Constituent School Board for District 23. She has experience as a Director of Child Development and worked with a variety of agencies in social services, mental health, and corrections. She identifies many challenges in the district including: the COVID-19 pandemic; low test scores; discipline disparities; funding and racial disparities; and increased school violence. She supports operating schools like a business and believes school curriculum needs to be responsive to the marketplace. To address school reform issues, she would involve the School Improvement Councils, PTA’s, and Title 1 councils. When it comes to school choice, Dr. Frazier doesn’t believe it improves student learning; however, she supports having more charter schools in the district but opposes magnet schools and those run by third party operators. To address the issue of racial bias, she says that schools need training and more diversity in curriculum, staffing, and role models for students. Communication from the district needs improvement. Like many, she supports revisiting Act 388 and funding as an issue. Before increasing taxes, she favors transparency and accountability to the public. When it comes to school climate and safety, she supports having School Resource Officers (SROs) in the schools and thinks the district’s Progressive Discipline Plan is too complicated for parents and students to understand.

**Rev. Charles Glover** is a candidate for one of the open West Ashley seats on the consolidated school board. Rev. Glover is an experienced politician who has both run for office at the state level and has served on the constituent board. His main focus is on providing more funds for rural schools in his district, particularly District 23. He was very critical of the school board in how they are allocating funds across the district. He believes that there is racial discrimination at play where white and wealthy schools are receiving more attention or focus. He also believes there is unwise spending occurring at the district level that may be doing little to actually improve education. He is deeply concerned about movements to close and consolidate rural schools in the district. He believes that this is unjust because it means that students in the rural districts will not be properly served. He appears to support the idea of a possible charter school in the rural area to keep students in the local schools. He also emphasizes the importance of recruiting high quality and experienced teachers in this region of the district. He notes that due to the challenges these schools face, they often have high teacher turnover and less experienced teachers in the classroom, which is a significant problem particularly with behavior issues. He believes that there should be greater incentives to attract teachers in this area of the county. He also stresses the need for board members to be advocating for the schools, not only at the county level but also at the state level. Rev. Glover also is opposed to the actions of groups like the Charleston Coalition for Kids. He also believes there is an aspect of skewed priorities in the school district with decisions being made based on issues like the real estate market rather than the best interest of the students and community.

**Rev. John Prioleau Sr**..is running for the West Ashley board seat. He previously ran in the Democratic primaries in House District 116. He expresses some concerns about violence in schools. He stresses the need for ensuring that students are receiving the resources that are available to them and that they are aware of how to employ these resources to be successful. He also emphasizes the importance of holistic community transformation to change some of the problems plaguing the school system. He appears to be very supportive of educators and highlights the importance of students doing well academically and behaviorally. He stresses the need for strong investment in students.

**Hunter Schimpff** is a candidate for the West Ashley board seat. As a former teacher, K-12 district administrator, and parent of a current public school student, Hunter Schimpff brings valuable experiences in K-12 education to work towards improving schools in the Lowcountry. As a former high school math teacher, he believes that more should be done to support teachers in the district. He contends that school board decisions directly impact our teachers and how classrooms function. He seeks a seat on the school board because he believes that there is a need for more school system decision-makers who have had classroom experience. As a plan for improving education. Schimpff advocates for investing in community neighborhood schools along with strategically investing in public choice options to provide excellent school for all families. Although he purports that more should be done to support teachers in the district, he has accused local public education advocacy groups of being associated with outside teachers’ unions or being NEA teacher union funded. Schmipff is also a strong advocate for charter schools and in partnership with Eric Strickland, a board member of the Charleston Coalition for Kids, established Compass Collegiate Academy through the SC Public Charter School District despite the plan being originally denied by the Charleston County School District (CCSD).

***The November 3th election will also give Charleston County voters the opportunity to elect new Constituent School Board Members who are elected by individual district residents ONLY. There are eight Constituent Districts and 50 candidates for 24 open seats. QEP strongly encourages voters to become familiar with the candidates from your district. The Constituent Board handles school discipline issues, determining school attendance lines and approving transfer requests.***

 October 2020