

Candidate Name: Merrel Miller

School Board District #:1

FAYETTE COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATE QUESTIONS

1. What are the top three (3) issues facing Fayette County Public Schools (FCPS)?

From a Global standpoint, I believe that the Board needs to reestablish control of the actions of the Director to be in line with the individuals that are the elected representatives. My basic belief is that all change begins and ends with leadership and the Board needs to be able to lead in the right direction. Some key specific issues are: (1) bringing to closure the requirements of the 60-year-old Consent Order, (2) successfully address the hiring and retention of the teachers which is a multifaceted issue (not just pay), and (3) safety for all in our schools and buses.

2. What are your thoughts on Civics being taught in FCPS?

Civics is a foundational aspect for all students. They need to understand their responsibilities as citizens. This requires a good understanding of our system of government, the Constitution, and our history. Without this solid foundation, dysfunction results.

3. Do you believe critical race theory and gender identity should be taught in schools? If so, why and in what grade(s)? If not, why not?

There is no place in our schools for CRT and gender related teachings. CRT is designed to divide our nation and is clearly not what we need as we face the challenges ahead for the county and our nation. Gender related topics need to be left to the family. I firmly believe that there are two genders-male and female which should be reinforced in all of our school actions.

4. What is the correlation between school board funding and state ranking of public schools?

On the surface, there seems to be an inverse relationship of spending per student in Fayette County given the poor results in the basic reason why our schools exist, which is to properly educate the students to be prepared to be productive and responsible citizens. I believe this is because we spend too much on administration and are not effective in managing the funds we have. In my view, we need to prioritize our spending towards instruction and long-term support and infrastructure to make Fayette County schools a desirable place to educate our children.

5. What can be done to slow down the exodus from FCPS to Arlington, Lakeland, and Collierville Schools?

We all make value judgements constantly and one of the most important ones is educating our precious children. The factors include the educational results (we're currently at the bottom), the basic safety for students and staff, and means to get the children to and from the schools. To get parents to make the value judgment to stay in the Fayette County school system will take much effort by the new board and won't come immediately. Starting to address the systemic issues of improving instruction, safety, and transportation will begin to not only keep students in our system but will also attract new families to our county.

6. How do you define bad behavior and how should students be held accountable?

I define bad behavior as behavior that is outside of the norms of good citizenship and respect for others.

7. What policy solutions would you bring to the school board that would eliminate bad conduct both in the classroom and on the buses?

To establish good behavior the leadership of the school system needs to develop clear standards, communicate and train students, teachers, and administrators these standards, and consistently apply these standards. It behooves the administrators to actively ensure that these standards are being consistently maintained. A couple of beliefs I have are that there are (1) the benefits of “managing by wandering around” (seeing what’s actually taking place in the schools and transportation), and (2) my basic belief that “high standards get high results”. These high results will be achieved in part by having the appropriate and consistently applied discipline system in place.

8. Do you have any additional comments as to why you feel you should be considered for this position.

The task ahead is daunting and will require a lot of effort, skills, and teamwork from the Board. I bring to the party years of experience of running a business and the organizational and people skills required to do so. One of my strengths is problem solving. My solutions are always ones not limited by current thinking. I look at the current situation/problems assuming that good solutions can and will be found. Many people are bound by wanting to stay the same and thus are limited to slow progress. I’m not one of these people.

Prior to retirement I was an executive for Procter and Gamble who was responsible for most of the world’s production of Pringles Potato Crisps. This was total responsibility for all aspects of production, quality, costs, delivery, and the development of the organization. I had approximately 1500 employees who were my direct responsibility to hire (and fire as needed) with the objective in mind to grow and develop an organization to deliver today’s results and grow for future results. One of the key indicators of success beyond business results was that my plant, located in Jackson TN, was awarded the TPM Award of Excellence, the worldwide manufacturing process that builds in and ensures the highest quality products.