



Columbia | Mt. Pleasant | Spring Hill

**MAURY COUNTY**

Chamber & Economic Alliance

# 2016 School Board Candidate Questionnaire





**Candidate Name: Bettye Kinser  
District 2**

**1. Why are you running for the Maury County School Board?**

As a retired classroom teacher, I understand the pressures and impact of decisions by the Board. I hope that my classroom experience will help me to serve as an advocate for teachers and students and be a voice for their concerns and needs.

**2. What experience do you have in working with other boards/organizations where you worked with a group of people to solve complex issues?**

As a member of The King's Daughters and Sons, I have served in several leadership roles, State President, International officer and presently President of The Board of Directors of The King's Daughters School. While teaching I was the Chief Negotiator for the first contract between Maury County Public Schools and Maury County Education Association. In this capacity, I received extensive training on State and Federal Education Laws and Board Policies. It involved negotiating salary, benefits, and working conditions for teachers. I served in this capacity for 5 years. I am presently a facilitator and mentor of COMPASS, a program for at-risk students with the Maury County Juvenile Court and Westminster Presbyterian Church. The purpose of the program is to change the "inner compass" of juveniles who for different reasons have become part of the court system.

**3. What are your top 3 priorities for the Maury County school system? How would you contribute to achieving these priorities?**

My number one priority will always be to put the needs and safety of students first. I feel that learning takes place in a classroom with a teacher. Therefore my second priority is to provide the benefits and compensation to attract and attain the best teachers. Thirdly, I feel students learn better in a safe and well equipped environment with the tools needed to prepare them for the future. It is the duty of the Administration and Board to ensure this.

**4. How would you contribute to the 7 Keys to College and Career Readiness?**

I support our Director in this challenge to meet these goals. I am sure as a Board we will be evaluating and monitoring the progress.

**5. How do you plan to address and manage the growth in Maury County schools over the next 5 years?**

First and foremost we must have a plan to fully maintain our present schools. In the past we have postponed maintenance because of lack of funds. We must be proactive in keeping our buildings maintained and safe. We need to work with the County Commission to establish a growth plan. This plan should be both for the maintenance of existing schools and the need based on projected growth for new schools.

**6. What do you believe is the biggest obstacle facing the Maury County school system at this time:**

**a. From the student perspective**

I am concerned at the figures for student attendance. I think that we must involve parents and make them accountable for students the excessive absences. We need to make students feel excited about school and offer more challenging and relevant curriculum for whatever path they are seeking in life.

**b. From the administrations perspective**

Change always has its challenges. I think working to bring everyone on board to work together to accomplish the 7 Keys is a priority.

**a. From the community perspective**

We must involve everyone in participating and supporting the goals for our schools. Informed stake holders are essential. I believe it takes parents, teachers, community leaders and businesses working together to make education a priority.

**7. How would you sell Maury County schools to a prospective new family?**

My sons and two of my grandchildren are products of Maury County Schools. I have always been a passionate advocate of Public Education and especially Maury County Schools. I would share the many positive accomplishments of students in academics, athletic and leadership roles. I know from personal experience that we are blessed with outstanding educators who are dedicated to excellence.

**8. If elected, how do you plan to partner with the Maury County Chamber & Economic Alliance to further the goals of our members?**

I am pleased that Education is a priority. The first question that comes up whether relocating a business or a family is how strong our schools and the commitment our community has for excellence. I think that now more than in the past that commitment is strong and I look forward to working with the Chamber and Economic Alliance to achieve these goals.

**Candidate Name: James Pennings**  
**District 4**

No information was received.



**Candidate Name: Nathan Adkison  
District 6**

*Mr. Adkison provided a narrative in response to the questions.*

I am running for the Maury County school board to ensure our children are receiving the best education possible and in the safest schools we can provide. Providing the best education for our children is my key concern for running for school board along with ensuring that we are not wasting funds that our tax payers are providing. As a father with children attending our public schools, investing in their future as well as the additional 12,000 children in Maury County Public Schools is vital for the future and growth of Maury County.

I believe my experience with the military, volunteer services with the Santa Fe Fire Department and as a small business owner should contribute greatly with the school board. I have served 27 years with the TN Army National Guard and currently serve as a first sergeant in Pulaski and Fayetteville, TN. I manage over 80 personnel of different sex, race and religion. I manage all personal needs from food, to finance and also at times I become involved in family issues. I help resolve issues from a military standpoint. I am available to my community as a volunteer fireman for fire and rescue at any time. During my time as a small business owner, I managed payroll and was able to maintain full time employment for 10-12 employees.

My priorities will be the best education possible that we can provide for the future of our students. To provide them with a path to success during their high school years and into their college years as they become adults.

I believe school board members must work collaboratively in looking for ways to fund new growth by helping develop a framework for orderly growth and progress. I believe my career with the military will assist the school board in helping develop ideas for the growth of Maury County.

From a student's stand point, they face many challenges. One challenge is bullying and being afraid of their safety in the public schools. Another is the amount of preparation that our leadership provides for their preparedness in their next step in life. I feel there is not enough guidance to direct our children on the path to becoming successful college students and adults.

From an administration perspective I think we need to find ways to recruit new teachers, and have supply demands met in order to provide necessary educational materials needed for every student.

From a communities perspective, we need to provide a safe school for our students to learn. Have staff ready and available to meet the ever changing growth of each individual community.

In closing, my efforts as a board member would center on serving all of the children in the community; one child is no more important than another. Our schools are here to serve the educational needs of all children. All parents, district personnel, as well as students must be partners in the endeavor if we are to be successful.

**Candidates Name: John Almon  
District 6**

*No information was received.*



**Candidate Name: Jerry Lassiter  
District 6**

**1. Why are you running for Maury County School Board?**

When I first ran for school board in 2006, I ran because I felt Maury County needed to advance academics and at the same time be accountable to taxpayers. After serving almost 2 ½ terms on the board I still believe that is true. I have seen more advancement in MCPS in the last year than I saw since 2006. I hope that the voters of the 6th district will continue to let me serve as their school board representative. I have a lot of energy around the Keys to College and Career Readiness. I am also a huge fan of career and technical education (CTE). CTE can help expose students to new ideas and life paths. CTE can help both college and non-college bound students prepare for their futures. On the taxpayer accountability side the 2016-17 school year budget was based on each school's needs to be successful in their implementation of the keys. For the first time since 2006, I felt the board took a budget to the commission that could be rationalized and explained. I was proud to be part of that.

**2. What experience do you have in working with other boards/organizations where you worked with a group of people to solve complex issues?**

My experiences working with other boards/organizations include 4H in my youth, which included planning week long camps (giving me leadership training and perspective from a teenage point of view). As an adult I have worked with Scouts and I was the South Central Regional Representative for Tennessee State PTA. I have worked with many teams to troubleshoot and repair industrial equipment. Although it is not an outside organization, I have been on MCPS board for almost 9 ½ years.

**3. What are your top 3 priorities for the Maury County School System? How would you contribute to achieving these priorities?**

My first priority for MCPS is safety. Every student should be safe (physically and emotionally) and feel safe from bus stop to bus stop. This includes preventing bullying and harassment. Students must also have a safe, healthy, and comfortable learning environment. MCPS employees and visitors must have a safe environment to educate students and participate in school events. I supported and voted to update schools for controlled access. I also voted to allocate funds to further control unauthorized access to building. I voted to approve new measures to enhance school bus safety.



I support these measures as well as training and preparations for disasters and unwanted situations. I also support new programs to help stop bullying and harassment. I have also voted to allow extensive HVAC work to be done to all MCPS buildings to allow for a more comfortable and healthier environment.

My second priority is getting all children engaged in learning. This is being done by problem based learning, technology for all students, and hands on learning. New math and reading programs are showing great improvements. New and expanded programs are being developed and enhanced. I support and will push for every student, from elementary school through high school, to be taught to the best of their ability. Dr. Marczak scored at the top of my interview list because of his suggestions for many of these programs. I am proud of the fact that I was able to vote to choose him as our new director. My third priority would be handling the new population growth in MCPS. As Maury County grows, MCPS will have to balance the building of new schools with maintaining the current schools. (See question 5 for more detail.) We must work together as a county to find new and innovative ways to handle this new growth.

**4. How would you contribute to the 7 Keys to College and Career Readiness?**

Even though the keys were developed by MCPS and the community, they are very universal and prepare our students for worldwide success. I try to tell all interested parties how excited I am about our 7 keys. I voted to allocate millions of dollars for supplies, programs and instructors to use toward their implementation. I encouraged fellow board members to allocate money for summer and vacation enrichment camps that would correlate with the keys. I also try to recruit people and businesses to donate time, expertise, and/or money to help students and schools implement the 7 keys.

**5. How do you plan to address and manage growth in Maury County Schools over the next 5 years?**

Dr. Marczak's plan for 21st century schools is in the process of being rolled out to the school board and the community and at present I have not seen his plan and therefore cannot include it in my answer.

MCPS will have to have more classroom space in the near future. The problem is predicting what kind of classrooms will be needed and when. Planning commissions across our county are letting rental units to be built in droves. When this happens, the population is very unstable, and so is the student population that needs to be served. As tenants change, so do the numbers and ages of children in those households. One year an area may be heavy on middle school students, overcrowding the area schools with middle school students. A year or two later the population may shift to being heavy on elementary students or possibly high school students. Maury County cannot afford to build new schools to be full one or two years and half full the next year or two. Therefore we must work together as a county to control the number of rentals in any one area and the rapid spread of subdivisions without proper infrastructure. The county must also work together to decide how to best utilize existing schools as well as the type of new schools we build and where they are built. I also believe we need to look at ways other communities have successfully handled rapid growth. There are communities where students go to school in shifts. Some students and parents have commented on the fact that they enjoyed having alternatives for school start times. It may or may not work for Maury County, but I believe we should research options and present them to the community for consideration.

**6. What do you believe is the biggest obstacle facing the Maury County School System at this time:**

**a. From the student perspective**

I believe one of the biggest obstacles from a student perspective is students asking “Why?” Why do I have to do this, I am never going to use this in real life. Why am I doing this? These tests are too long, too hard, and too frequent. Why should I do this, I am not going to college? Why am I doing this, I are ready know it? It is vital to get students to see a purpose for learning math, science, and English for 13 years.

**b. From the administrations perspective**

I believe one of the biggest obstacles from an administrations perspective is logistics. How will they get everything done in the short amount of time that is given each school year?

**c. From the community perspective**

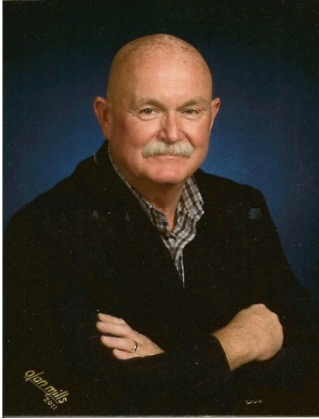
I believe many community members are frustrated with a poor performing school system. Many from the community want a better system and want to be involved in improving the school system, yet feel unwelcome or locked out and without a voice.

**7. How do you sell Maury County Schools to a prospective new family?**

I would sell MCPS to a new family by telling them the same as I would to an existing family. Although MCPS has issues, the system is going through drastic renovations. Dr. Chris Marczak is leading the charge, with help from the community, in implementing the 7 keys to college and career readiness. The school system is starting a problem based learning environment which will engage and educate all students for life. Maury County is rallying around the new direction the school system is heading, allowing for great partnerships and advantages for all students.

**8. If elected, how do you plan to partner with the Maury County Chamber & Economic Alliance to further the goals of our members?**

I will partner with the Maury County Chamber & Economic Alliance to further the goals of their members by continuing and expanding my support of MCPS helping students prepare for Tennessee Promise. I try to relay the great things happening in our schools. I push for responsible use of facilities improvement and repair. I am a big advocate of our new keys preparing all students for success after high school, be it in college, military, or vocational training. I support educating students to be globally successful, which provides Maury County businesses with access to a vast pool of highly trained and skilled workers. Having highly skilled and trained workers will encourage current businesses to stay in Maury County and will encourage other great businesses to look to move to or to expand in Maury County. I look forward to the chance to help push MCPS in the new direction they are going.



**Candidate Name: Howard “Denny” Beaver  
District 8**

**1. Why are you running for Maury County School Board?**

As a member of the Maury County School Board for the past four years, we as a board have made several major changes which took a lot of soul searching to make the best decisions for the students, school system and the tax payers of Maury County. After a lot of sleepless nights and prayers I made the decision to continue this effort and be a part of supporting the changes that the current board has made.

**2. What experience do you have in working with others boards/organizations where you worked with a group of people to solve complex issues?**

For the past ten years I have been President of the Culleoka Alumni Scholarship Association. The Association is a seven member board whose main purpose is raising money to fund a scholarship to a graduating senior at Culleoka Unit School. I was there at its inception and then the planning stages to help form this 501c3 organization. Although the Association is not as complex in any way as the Maury County School System, it does take planning, involvement and commitment. I also worked for Electronic Warfare Associates for 13 years in which I had 50 people working under me in designing and developing instrumentation packages for multiple air defense systems.

**3. What are your top 3 priorities for the Maury County School System? How would you contribute to achieving these priorities?**

**#1 - Planning and setting goals for the direction we as a board are wanting to go.** Develop a five year plan for all aspects of our system to include curriculum, instruction, teacher development, building maintenance, new developments, and community involvement. Ensure this plan is reviewed every couple of years to evaluate how closely our plan is being followed. If adjustments need to be made they will be made at the time of review.

**#2 - Get parents more involved in their children's education.** Create a welcoming climate at every school so that when a family enters a school building they feel that it is a place where they "belong". This is only the first step. Make parents aware of the many forms of communication (school website, robo calls, class newsletters, etc.) that the school uses. Encourage the importance of parent volunteers.

**#3 - Generate public support.** Changes have recently been made to improve our marketing techniques and I believe we are seeing positive results. We need to ensure that this continues so we have a shared sense of direction and a willingness to share responsibility between the school system and the community.

**4. How would you contribute to the 7 Keys to College and Career Readiness?**

By being an advocate, encouraging our community and our funding body to support our initiative in making this a priority for our system.

**5. How do you plan to address and manage the growth in Maury County Schools over the next 5 years?**

As a board, I think we will take the information that all the agencies provide us in projective growth and develop a plan to address these needs. It may require temporarily rezoning, as well as, beginning to prepare for future building projects.

**6. What do you believe is the biggest obstacle facing the Maury County School System at this time:**

- a. From the student perspective**  
Hard to say, because it would vary from school to school
- b. From the administrations perspective**  
Low test scores
- c. From community perspective**  
Possible increase in taxes to meet educational needs

**7. How would you sell Maury County Schools to a prospective new family?**

As an advocate for Maury County Schools, I would share with them our new MCPS Keys to College and Career Readiness which shows our desire to help every student succeed. Also, promote our vision statement: Educating every child for life.

**8. If elected, how do you plan to partner with the Maury County Chamber & Economic Alliance to further the goals of our members?**

By tying our MCPS Keys to College and Career Readiness goals to the needs of the local industry, we will be able to provide a better workforce for Maury County.



**Candidate Name: Donna Morency  
District 10**

**1. Why are you running for Maury County School Board?**

I am encouraged by the new direction the Maury County School District is taking and would love to be a part its continued progress.

**2. What experience do you have in working with other boards/organizations where you worked with a group of people to solve complex issues?**

I currently serve on a number of boards at the state, county and city level; Retire Tennessee and the Tennessee Three-Star Program at the state level, Maury County Tourism Board at the county level and the Board of Zoning and Appeals and the Mount Pleasant Chamber of Commerce at the city level. I am the Executive Director of the Mount Pleasant Community Development Corporation, the Arrow Lake Foundation and am a member of the Board of Directors of the Kids on Stage Foundation. For the fourth year in a row, I am serving as chairman of the Mid-South BBQ Festival.

**3. What are your 3 top priorities for the Maury County School System? How would you contribute to achieving these priorities?**

**1. Literacy:** I am currently working with our local community to install 5 more “Little Free Libraries” in the Mount Pleasant area. This will help make books readily available to everyone and would support key #1 by encouraging families to read together. I would also support programs brought before the school board that help promote literacy.

**2. College Readiness:** I would support programs that ensure that all high school students have the opportunity to take classes that prepare them for college. Advance placement classes need to be available at all schools.

**3. Attendance:** I was shocked to hear the attendance rates of the Maury County School System and will support any program that will help improve attendance. Students need to be in school in order to learn and it is our job to make sure that they are there.

**4. How would you contribute to the 7 Keys to College and Career Readiness?**

The 7 keys are essential to the improvement of the Maury County School System and I would support any programs designed to contribute to them. I would encourage local business and industry leaders to become more involved and would work closely with them to connect with the schools and students.

**5. How do you plan to address and manage the growth in Maury County schools over the next 5 years?**

In the next 5 years, growth in Maury County will surely become a problem for the Maury County School District. As a member of the Maury County School Board, I would support working on a 5 year strategic plan with the projected growth in mind so that we are proactive and not reactive to this problem.

**6. What do you believe is the biggest obstacle facing the Maury County school system at this time:**

**a. From the student perspective**

I am more familiar with the Mount Pleasant schools and am speaking from that view point. From the high school student's perspective, I think the lack of classes that are available at MPHS. Additional art and AP classes are scheduled for the coming year, and I am encouraged by the improvements being made.

**b. From the administrations perspective**

I would imagine attendance is one of the biggest obstacles facing the administration. With low attendance rates in Maury County Schools it would be very difficult to achieve the 7 keys.

**c. From the community perspective**

Maury County School District's low ratings are a detriment to both community and industrial development. An educated workforce and school rankings are extremely important to both prospective industries and new home buyers.

**7. How would you sell Maury County schools to a prospective new family?**

The best way to sell Maury County schools to new families moving into the area is to concentrate on the new direction of the system and improvements that are being made.

**8. If elected, how do you plan to partner with the Maury County Chamber & Economic Alliance to further the goals of our members?**

As Vice-president of the Mount Pleasant Chamber of Commerce and the Executive Director of the Mount Pleasant Community Development Corporation, my goals are directly in line with those of the Maury County Chamber and Economic Alliance. I would continue to support the goals of these organizations.



**Candidate Name: Lea Thomason  
District 10**

**1. Why are you running for the Maury County School Board?**

Good decisions lead to success. Poor decisions lead to ineffectiveness and failure. Our children deserve the best; with a child in our school system, this hits close to home for me. I want ALL children in Maury County to have the best decisions made as it relates to their education. As a citizen, I understand I am only one cog in the wheel of a larger system, but I want to do my part for a better Maury County.

**2. What experience do you have in working with other boards/ organizations where you worked with a group of people to solve complex issues?**

In working for the State of Tennessee, I work closely with groups of others on a daily basis to ensure that complex situations are handled in an effective manner. I have people depending on me each day -- depending on my decision-making that effects their livelihood. It is important to work with others and find common ground for the greater good -- I do it everyday.

**3. What are your top three priorities for the Maury County school system? How would you contribute to achieving these priorities?**

I have one priority: our children. By working together, the Board can tackle tough decisions in order to grow our schools and affect the quality of education our children receive by making certain we have the best leaders in our schools, that those leaders are bringing in and retaining the best teachers, and that the facilities in which our children depend on are safe, maintained, and well-ordered.

**4. How would you contribute to the 7 Keys to College and Career Readiness?**

Our elementary schools are the root from which our educational tree grows. With Keys 1 and 2, we must make sure that our teachers are equipped to make certain our children are proficient and active readers as well as understanding of basic mathematical concepts. If these two are in place, the other five keys will easily work to unlock the doors to success. I would be in favor of hearing all ideas teachers have and funding those ideas, which prove to be successful. Field trips, guest speakers and readers, bringing in whatever we can and doing whatever we can do to ensure students are engaged and active learners.

**5. How do you plan to address and manage the growth in Maury County schools over the next five years?**

There is no doubt that Maury County will see monumental growth over the next five years as people make their way down the I-65 corridor and see what great things Maury County has to offer. Our schools will need to adapt and change and there is no one answer for this question because we can't be certain of what exactly to expect over the next five years in terms of growth. What the Board CAN address and make a priority is this: be prepared to work together on tough matters and make sure teachers and administrators have the tools they need to see success and growth.

**6. What do you believe is the biggest obstacle facing the Maury County school system at this time from the students' perspective, from the administrations' perspective, from the community perspective?**

I have the unique perspective of having been a student in Maury County myself, having a child who is currently a student, and having a husband who has been with the school system for 14 years. No one else running has this type of insight. While some may point to funding, I have never believed that money equals a quality education; it takes hard-working, dedicated people who feel appreciated. Their passion will result in success on every level. While there are obstacles in any complex system, for the students, there are often situations that are sometimes out of the control of the school; we must make sure the students are provided a safe place that enriches their lives and gives them the tools to succeed once they walk across that graduation stage.

For the school administration, the biggest obstacle would be the amount of work required of them, sometimes so much that they can't focus on adequately managing their staff and their students. Success starts at the top; our principals must be supported and not stretched beyond their means in order that they manage the day-to-day operations of their schools.

Even in this great age of technology, many in the community have no idea what is going on with our schools. We have lots to celebrate in Maury County! With a new director and new direction, there is a lot of information to share with our stakeholders and community members. We must further employ technology, social media, and any other avenue available to make Maury County citizens feel involved and "in the know."



**7. How would you sell Maury County schools to a prospective new family?**

The motto of Columbia is "Old South Charm, New South Progress". I think that applies to all of Maury County, not just Columbia. In some ways our schools and communities give the feel of the Maury County of old, yet we maintain a progressive education system. We have the best teachers in the county, I believe that because I know a great number of them and know their level of dedication. That in itself is the selling point -- we are in a time where everyone is working together from the Board to the director to those on the front lines. With the addition of the new Central High School, I believe we have some great buildings and facilities for students. More than that, I believe we offer opportunities for success. Our schools have produced students who have gone on to Ivy League Schools, professional baseball and football players, and thousands of untold success stories. We provide the foundation for a child to literally do whatever their heart and mind desires!

**8. If elected, how do you plan to partner with the Maury County Chamber & Economic Alliance to further the goals of our members?**

With doing what is right for the students of Maury County at the forefront of all our decision-making, working together with all stakeholders is imperative. We must all come together in whatever way we can, handle tough issues, and work diligently to create a better and brighter Maury County. Together we can, in fact, GROW MAURY!