

9 QUESTIONS FROM



Meet the Candidate: Charles Kennedy

1. Why are you running? If elected, what would be your top goals as school board member? **I am running because I saw a lack of qualified, experienced candidates. Being a former school board member in Manatee County, I am running to provide experienced, professional leadership.**
2. What can be done to ensure everyone who graduates is either ready for college or a vocation? **There are very few kids graduating now who are not ready for college or a job.**
3. How should the district address underperforming schools? **Since “underperforming” schools tend to be those in lower socio-economic neighborhoods, the best way to address these schools is through additional resources. Federal Title 1 money provides additional resources, however when dealing with students and families live in or near poverty, there is always a need for more support, whether it’s counseling, tutoring, parent education, etc.**
4. Local and state initiatives have been launched to address the need for more teachers in our classrooms. What more do you think needs to be done to recruit and retain teachers in your district? **We’ve already done it in Manatee County. Through the pay increases we have been able to achieve through our additional one-mill of property tax, Manatee teachers are now among the highest paid in the state. Florida is facing a crisis, right now, with teacher shortages. Fortunately, and thanks to Manatee County voters, we have been spared from the worst of that, for now.**
5. What is your stance on the state’s current school choice program? **School choice is fine, but in Florida, charters and private schools can accept public money, but aren’t held to the same standards as public schools. Any school receiving taxpayer funds, should be held to exist same standards – in school assessment, construction rules and free from discrimination.**
6. Does school testing really give an accurate portrayal of the education quality/experience of a school? **No. I work at a C school, that was a D last year. I love working there and our school community is wonderful. However, it’s a very poor, working class neighborhood and students who live in poverty (overall) tend to not perform as well at school due to environmental factors they’ve contended with since before they were born.**
7. Issues surrounding gender, sexuality and race have created controversy between school boards and parents. How much say should parents have in deciding what is and is not included in the public school curriculum? **Parents should have input on curriculum and be able to opt their child out of material/lessons they don’t like. Parents do not, however, have the right to dictate what other children should and should not be taught.**

8. Do you feel students are safe at school? Or does more need to be done to protect school campuses? **I work at a Title 1 elementary school. Our school is very safe from outsiders. The best thing we can do to make sure kids are safe – and feel safe – is to reduce the burden and incidence of peer pressure and bullying when it arises. School security measures in place since 2018 (since Parkland) have dramatically improved each school’s security posture.**

9. Do you feel any changes are needed to your district’s budget? Is money being spent in the right places? **Our district’s budget is being spent judiciously as evidenced by 10+ years of clean audit’s and a very healthy reserve balance, that now far exceeds state requirements.**

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Meet the Candidate: Jonathan Lynch

1. Why are you running? If elected, what would be your top goals as school board member?
As a father of two daughters currently enrolled in the Manatee County School System, one of my top priorities is to safeguard and protect our parental rights. We all experienced a lot of overreach in the past, much of it based on fear, not facts. We cannot let that happen again. It is hard to sum up my other goals in under one hundred words, but much of my focus will be on the budget and supporting our teachers. We have made great progress with starting salaries over the past four years, but in my opinion the teachers with tenure were overlooked. Being in a trade industry myself, I would like to expand the OJT/trades programs available.
2. What can be done to ensure everyone who graduates is either ready for college or a vocation?
The most simple answer I can give is from my own experience growing up. Listen to your child. Not every child is college bound. Focus on the options available earlier in your child's life. Hopefully, by high school they can have a goal in mind and a program available to start learning and experiencing it. It is much easier to change course in high school than it is later in life. Stay connected with your child's teachers and counselors to ensure that the courses selected have them on the right path for that child's goals.
3. How should the district address underperforming schools?
Communication with principals and a course of action. An underperforming school can happen for a number of reasons. Low early learning enrollment, language barriers, low test scores, parental involvement, behavior issues, even the administration can greatly change a school's performance. The problem cannot be corrected without determining the cause. Knowing that not every child will have the same struggles, not every school will have the same struggles. As a district it is our job to identify the root cause and have a plan of action and the appropriate resources for each unique situation.
4. Local and state initiatives have been launched to address the need for more teachers in our classrooms. What more do you think needs to be done to recruit and retain teachers in your district?
As mentioned above we have made great progress in the past four years regarding starting pay for teachers with a bachelor's degree, which is imperative for recruiting teachers. Our friends that are teachers with tenure still feel they were overlooked. The worst part is, when adjusted for inflation wages have decreased by an average of 5% compared to what they made roughly 10 years ago. Addressing this promptly will help retain the teachers already here. As a district, we cannot sustain the course we are on. The focus needs to be on smarter spending not more taxing.
5. What is your stance on the state's current school choice program?

It is a program that works well for several families I know. There is no downside to enrolling your child in a school that offers them programs to be more engaged and successful.

6. Does school testing really give an accurate portrayal of the education quality/experience of a school?

In my opinion, probably not. Many students are bad test takers. A lot of time in the classroom seems to be teaching the test. I don't believe someone's likeliness for success can be judged on a test. I understand it is used as a standard of measurement, but it isn't the only way to measure the success of the child, teacher or school.

7. Issues surrounding gender, sexuality and race have created controversy between school boards and parents. How much say should parents have in deciding what is and is not included in the public school curriculum?

I believe parents should have complete discretion regarding what is in the curriculum. We send our children to school to learn how to think for themselves, not what to think. The curriculum should not include anything beyond Science, Math, History, Health, PE, Music, Art, Computer Science, etc. If a parent wants their child to learn about anything beyond a standard curriculum, they can do so on their own. Taxpayer money should not be used to teach anything beyond the core subjects needed to for a child to advance to the next grade level.

8. Do you feel students are safe at school? Or does more need to be done to protect school campuses?

Yes, I feel teachers and students are safe. So many safety protocols have been put in place over the last several years and as a parent I am very pleased with. It would be naive of me to say that we cannot do more to ensure our children's safety. I am aware that Florida as a whole has updated it's safety standards. The biggest issue with that is, two-thirds of the state mandates that are imposed on districts come without state funding for implementation. Safety and security should be a state priority on the budget.

9. Do you feel any changes are needed to your district's budget? Is money being spent in the right places?

Yes, changes are inevitable. However, the burden of fixing it cannot be tasked to one person. It is going to take a team of board members with an array of talents that can work together and agree on the same goal of building a successful business. It is the one of biggest businesses in Manatee County and should be treated as such. I believe that there is spending could and should be adjusted to other areas.

9 QUESTIONS FROM



Meet the Candidate: Perri Ann Parkman

1. Why are you running? I am running for the Manatee County School Board District 3 seat to provide a conservative voice on the school board advocating for adequate teacher salaries aligned with the cost of living in Florida, early learning with emphasis on the basics, the promotion of brain safe sports and the sustainment of safe environments for learning.
 - a. If elected, what would be your top goals as school board member?
 - i. Our teachers compensation package: Florida teaching salaries rank 50th in the nation and I feel that this is a horrible statistic and must be addressed. Salaries need to reflect not only the cost of living here in Florida, but also the fact that our teachers are certified and educated professionals that we entrust with the most critical formative years of our children.
 - ii. Early Learning Programs. Right now, only 50% of our third graders are reading at their grade level. I would like to move to proven reading methodologies to increase reading proficiency at the youngest of ages.
 - iii. Add a Comptroller or Qualified CPA to provide the board with financial guidance. There should be someone qualified in accounting, budgeting, and financing to assist the board in assessing the impact of long-term debt, audit ongoing contracts and analyze future educational funding requirements. A person with extensive experience in government contracting wouldn't hurt either.
2. What can be done to ensure everyone who graduates is either ready for college or a vocation? First, I want to add the military to this list as an option as I have seen so much positive growth that comes from a military career. For students, I think that focusing on early learning reading skills prepares student for their next grade as it facilitates learning. I think that children should be focusing on the basic skills necessary to either attend college or go into a vocation, reading, writing and arithmetic and ensuring that they can master the skills necessary before the move to the next level. I feel that college is not for everyone, and that working with the local community, adolescents can spend part of their time working in the areas of their interest.
3. How should the district address underperforming schools? For every underperforming school, there are underlying issues that need to be addressed. I feel that by sitting down with a schools administration, teachers and parents, good plans to reverse school performance can be developed. However, they must be based on measurable metrics that require schools to meet and, if they are not, then changes must occur to ensure the best possible education of our children.

4. Local and state initiatives have been launched to address the need for more teachers in our classrooms. What more do you think needs to be done to recruit and retain teachers in your district? Right now, Florida ranks 50th in teacher compensation and that is a shocking statistic we need to address. I want to work with the board and the county to make this a state issue and get the support we need to improve teachers pay. We have one of the best areas to live in Florida and we need to advertise that to attract and recruit teachers from around the country and I think we can leverage that better.
5. What is your stance on the state's current school choice program? I support this. I feel that parents should be in control of identifying the best school for their children's education and we do provide one of the best selections of educational choices of any state in the country.
6. Does school testing really give an accurate portrayal of the education quality/experience of a school? No. Benchmark tests like FAST give a teacher an idea of what a student needs to focus on so they can work with them to improve. However, there are many factors that determine the quality of education and I would support additional assessment measures like how safe the school is, absenteeism, extracurricular participation, violent incidents, availability of counseling etc.
7. Issues surrounding gender, sexuality and race have created controversy between school boards and parents. How much say should parents have in deciding what is and is not included in the public school curriculum? Parents have every right to voice their opinions on what should or should not be included in a school's curriculum and it's the school board, as elected representatives of the county, to listen. However, we need to focus on the basics of education, and these political agendas have no place in a conversation about a child's education. I think where there is substantial support for something to be included or excluded, the Board must work with local elected officials to push these issues need up to the state level, as the basic curricula is determined there by the Florida Department of Education.
8. Do you feel students are safe at school? Or does more need to be done to protect school campuses? I have no reason to believe that our kids are not safe and I feel that the administration has made safety a priority. I would however, ensure that there is close coordination and communication with our local authorities to prevent or respond to an issue.
9. Do you feel any changes are needed to your district's budget? Is money being spent in the right places? I am concerned about the long term debt that we have taken on to build schools and wonder how the price of a school can double in the last 6-7 years. I would like to dive deeply into the budget to determine why we need 45% of the budget to handle administrative issues to support our teachers and to look for areas to decrease costs through outsourcing, finding efficiencies and combining programs that overlap.