

Meeting the candidate: Allison Campbell

1. Why are you running? If elected, what would be your top goals as school board member?

- I am running for re-election as a mother of three MCPS students. I can't emphasize enough that I'm a voice for the parent, not a politician. I intend to focus more closely on: Accountability, because high expectations of students and staff produce greater results; Budgeting for student success, because funding should follow students, and; Common sense in education, because the next generation deserves our best.

2. In what school district or community activities/organizations have you been involved?

- Take Stock in Children mentor, United Way Education Vision Council, Governor's West Neighborhood Revitalization Council, Ocala Women's Network, Florida Public Relations Association Ocala Chapter, and former board member of the Public Education Foundation of Marion County, NonProfit Business Council, and ARC Marion, Inc.

3. What is the top issue you believe the district needs to address?

- Teacher retention and recruitment – with highly effective teachers come engaged and interested students thereby increasing academic performance and positive classroom cultures. Recruitment relies on storytelling, and the District can tell ours better. MCPS is a great place to work. Let's share that throughout our community, state, and beyond. We emphasize recruiting from within, but focus should also be on retaining teachers. That comes down to culture and customer service. These are all areas in which I have experience as a professional and intend to be a thought partner with District staff to better tell our story.

4. What can be done to ensure everyone who graduates is either ready for college or a vocation?

- Our school counselors work diligently with high school students to assist them finding their “E:” Employment, Enlistment, Education (post-secondary) or Entrepreneurship. As we continue offering more career and technical opportunities at the middle and high school levels, including industry certifications that align with professions in our community as well as dual enrollment in Marion Technical College and the College of Central Florida, future graduates can identify the pathways to be successful in their future professions. We are preparing students for what comes next as we fulfill our mission of helping every student succeed.

5. How should the district address underperforming schools?

- We continually analyze data, and the state’s new progress monitoring system allows us to do that more frequently in concentrated ways. Ensuring schools are fully staffed with highly effective teachers in front of struggling students is imperative. At times, leadership changes may be necessary to impact underperforming schools. Having newer teachers collaborate and plan with successful, veteran educators provides continuity across grade levels. The District has taken significant steps toward improvement and continues to see progress in learning gains and academic growth. We will not be satisfied until every student reaches his or her full potential.

6. 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?

- I appreciate scholarship opportunities the District has offered for paraprofessionals moving into teaching roles as well as our Future Educator’s Academy at Vanguard High, but we can do more to tell our story in the community and beyond. Promoting starting teacher salaries for those considering education as a second career could help with recruitment. We also must better identify challenging school cultures and address individual needs to assist in retention. Statewide, we must continue to raise the salaries of veteran educators with 10 or more years of highly effective experience.

7. What is your stance on the state's current school choice program?

- I am supportive of school choice and believe Marion County Public Schools should do all we can to be "the choice." With multiple options for families, from magnet schools to career academies, students have multiple opportunities to meet their needs (barring no space constraints). The ability for families to utilize public school vouchers for private schools and homeschooling is impacting traditional public education in ways we haven't seen before. I believe this new system has potential to further the divide between affluent and marginalized communities. Therefore, it's vital for school districts to become even more efficient and effective.

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

- Standardized tests are just one metric used to identify academic progress and achievement. Every couple decades, we receive new tests and updated state standards, so it does take some time to acclimate to the changes. However, I believe the tests offer data that can be used to assess learning gains and academic mastery of certain tested subjects.

9. 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?

- As a parent of three Marion County Public School students, I believe very strongly in parent voice in their children's education. Having parents and community citizens serve on textbook review committees as well as reviewing library and classroom books they feel are age appropriate for their children aligns directly with state statute, which I support.

10. What is your rubric for deciding whether a book should be banned?

- The book must first be reviewed by a certified media specialist. Then the book is reviewed by an independent citizens advisory committee. The book is then recommended or not by the superintendent. If necessary and questions arise, the School Board can review those recommendations for further discussion based on grade level and parental consent. It is possible books contained in public community libraries may not belong in public schools.

11. What is your position on the new law that implements new rules for teacher unions?

- I understand the unions' role and believe they serve as both a voice for employees and are important to the collective bargaining process. My relationship with our unions speaks for itself. We may not always agree, but we are cordial, open and honest in communication often. Others may not have the same working relationships I've experienced, but I'm grateful to have both the AFL-CIO and Marion Education Association (teacher's union) endorsements again in 2024.

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

- Student safety is our top priority, and a safe and positive learning and working environment is Goal 2 of our Achieve 2026 Strategic Plan. We've taken great strides to ensure our students and staff are safe on our campuses and will continue to make security upgrades in the coming days, weeks, and years.

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

- The School Board will receive the 2024-2025 budget this week, and I look forward to working through the recommended allocations in the coming weeks. I continue to press for site-based budgeting so that budget dollars will follow students more closely. What that means is moving away from a centralized budgeting system into a de-centralized system with administrators managing their own budget allocations based on student population and needs. We should begin piloting schools on this model very soon.

Meeting the candidate: Beth McCall

1. Why are you running? If elected, what would be your top goals as school board member?

- My love for Ocala/Marion County, combined with years of dedicated work towards its betterment, drives my commitment to education and is the reason I am running for the School Board. I am committed to ensuring that when our students walk out of our high school doors, they possess the skills and knowledge necessary to become productive, contributing citizens whether they choose to go to college, enlist in the armed services or go directly into the workforce.

Top Goals:

- The growth in Marion County and the impact on our schools.
- Continue to work with the MCPS Career Technical Education Department to ensure that the CTE programs the school district offers are aligned with the needs of the business community.
- Recruiting and retention of teachers.

2. In what school district or community activities/organizations have you been involved?

- MCPS School Board member from 2016-2021
- 2021 Chair of the Florida School Board Advocacy Committee
- 2021 Chair of the Central Florida Public School Boards Coalition
- 2019 School Board Member of the Year for the Consortium of Florida Education Foundations
- 2020 School Board Member of the Year for the Florida Music Educators Association
- Current Executive Director of the Marion County Children's Alliance
- Executive Director of the Public Education Foundation 1999-2005
- Currently serving on the MCPS Safety Committee & Career Technical Advisory Committee
- Chair of the Golden Apple Selection Committee
- Take Stock in Children Mentor

3. What is the top issue you believe the district needs to address?

- Growth is one of biggest challenges facing the school district. Since the pandemic, Florida has become a desired place to live and Ocala is one of those desirable places. There are 259 people moving into Marion County weekly. Because of the diversified economy and the new companies coming to Ocala/Marion County, a large number of the people moving here are in their 30s and 40s. It is imperative that the city, county and school board work together to plan for infrastructure including the schools.

4. What can be done to ensure everyone who graduates is either ready for college or a vocation?

- The role of the school district is to provide the skills and knowledge necessary for all students to be productive members of society whether they attend college, enlist in the armed forces or go directly into the workforce upon graduation. As I did with the Chamber for 2 years, I will continue to work to ensure that the Career Technical Education programs the school district offers are aligned with the needs of the business community. I will work with local businesses and the district on ways that students can interact with industry experts through pre-internships, on the job training, and volunteerism to help with the workforce pipeline for Ocala/Marion County.

5. How should the district address underperforming schools?

- The emphasis on early learning is anticipated to significantly enhance student achievement over time. Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) program, is designed to prepare four-year-olds for the rigors of kindergarten. This program addresses various developmental areas, including literacy skills, social skills, and other foundational competencies essential for early success in formal education.
- Recruiting and retaining teachers is crucial to success. One innovative approach is the "grow your own" strategy, which focuses on nurturing potential educators such as paraprofessionals from within the community. Additionally, cultivating high school students within Education/Training Academies to pursue careers in education and return to teach in Marion County establishes a sustainable pipeline of future educators.

6. 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?

- Additionally, in Marion County, we have professionals and experts in math and science, and exceptional teachers and other professionals that have moved here to retire. Thinking of innovative ways to leverage the expertise of retirees to address teacher recruiting and retention could certainly help solve the problem.

7. What is your stance on the state's current school choice program?

- There are students who do not perform well in a traditional classroom and need alternative, often smaller, and more individualized instruction. Those students usually have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or a 504 plan. In this instance, I believe the choice of going to an alternative learning environment is warranted. I am not a proponent of taking public education funds for any student to attend private schools. Marion County Public School's academic performance needs to improve to the point that they are the # 1 choice of students and parents.

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

- State testing is one component of the accurate portrayal of education quality but it should not be the only measure of a school. In my opinion, a school portfolio made up of the following is a better measurement of a school:
 - Administrative Leadership
 - Number of highly effective & effective teachers
 - Teacher retention rates
 - Attendance
 - Discipline Referrals
 - Parent Engagement
 - Business Partner engagement
 - Students on or above grade level
 - State Testing scores

9. 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 always be involved in their children's education. They should have the ability to opt for their child on discussions and curriculum that they deem inappropriate.

10. What is your rubric for deciding whether a book should be banned?

- Age and subject appropriate books should be in public school libraries and classrooms. When I previously served on the board, we formed a committee made up of Marion County citizens to review books that had been challenged. The committee was charged with reviewing books and bring recommendations back to the board. This process worked well and is still the process that I would recommend today.

11. What is your position on the new law that implements new rules for teacher unions?

- I have no opinion on this issue.

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

- There is always more to do to protect our students at school. During my previous term, the board worked with the Marion County Sheriff's Department, Ocala Police Department and Belleview Police Department to place an SRO at every school and 2 at the largest high schools. Through the Sheriff's office, the guardian program was implemented. We began funding for all schools to have perimeter building to building fencing, single door entries, door buzzers and cameras.

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

- When I previously served on the school board, I brought a strong commitment to fiscal responsibility with a focus on maximizing resources for classrooms. Emphasizing cost savings and efficiency is key to ensuring that more funds directly benefit students and educators. The CFO of MCPS is an outstanding leader whose department has won numerous national finance awards. She keeps the board up to date and is transparent with the revenue and expenditures.