

Billy Benefield, Jr.  
District 4 School Board Candidate  
Natchitoches Parish

1. What experience do you have with complicated budgets? When you are given a very lengthy budget for the district, what will be your process to determine if it is a good budget for the system?

I retired from Weyerhaeuser Company after almost 30-years of service. The last 24 years as a Human Resources Manager. I supported two Weyerhaeuser facilities in two different cities the last ten years of employment. In a dual role at Weyerhaeuser, at the Natchitoches facility, I was the HR Manager and also the Purchasing Manager. I served the facility as Purchasing Manager for 15-years. During this time, I managed the maintenance department budget and spending as well as other departments.

I served on the Natchitoches Parish School Board for two terms many years ago. I believe in term limits and during my second term in office, I announced I would not seek re-election. While on the board, I served as Finance Committee Chairperson for several years. We faced many of the same issues the board faces today. We put in a detailed plan to balance the budget without closing schools.

I have vast experience with complicated and lengthy budgets both professionally and in service on the school board.

When faced with a lengthy budget you must look at the overall spend. This will allow you to immediately know how you must adjust. The General Fund of the Natchitoches Parish School Board is over 86% personnel costs. You must establish a firm staffing formula for the district based on available funds to provide for the education of the children of Natchitoches Parish. A good accurate budget has to have a solid foundation at the ground level. I have managed these type budgets.

2. In an era of more limited financial resources, how will you enlist support for bond issues or public-school spending from conservative voters or taxpayers with no children in the public schools? How can the school board prove itself accountable to those citizens?

The board must be able to demonstrate it can effectively manage the resources provided by all revenue streams. This is accomplished by transparent financial management and good decisions to manage the resources. The board must be able to reduce spending in areas of concern and find better ways to accomplish their goals. Creating and effectively using a Citizen's Budget Committee made up entirely of volunteers to make suggestions to the board is one way to demonstrate accountability and transparency. Most citizens do not resent paying taxes to support public education realizing these same students will become tax paying citizens in the

future. State budget constraints continue to impact local school board budgets. Insurance and retirement costs continue to go up and this is drain on our local system.

3. In your view, what has the district done well over the last five years? What has the district done poorly that you would change? Please provide specific examples.

The district has made good progress in the last year in district academic performance.

The district has done poorly in the following areas:

- Lack of financial transparency
    - Excessive spending on certain schools, especially the junior high building
    - Not spending anything on other buildings – Cloutierville with BRE money available
  - Staffing at certain schools – excessive headcount
  - Not fully utilizing the facilities within the City schools – Parks building
  - Attracting and retaining certified teachers – we have too many long-term substitutes
  - Fostering an atmosphere of morale, growth and inclusion
4. You represent a specific part of Natchitoches Parish- how will you balance the needs of your specific constituents with the needs of the overall school district?

District Four is in between the Marthaville and Provencal Districts. There will be no issue with the needs of District Four and any other district in the system. My record in the past demonstrates my stance on the greater good of our district both rural and city.

5. If a parent or a principal comes to you regarding, for example, a maintenance issue at a campus or a situation involving a particular teacher, how do you see your role as a school board member in resolving that issue?

Most people do not understand this situation, but when a school board member leaves the board room after a meeting has been adjourned, that board member loses any license and becomes like anyone else in the public. You are John Q. Public. A board member only has the authority to act as a board member while in a properly scheduled board meeting, no other time. There is a proper method for addressing these situations. You inform the Superintendent you have been contacted by the parties mentioned and provide the contact number for the party. You advise the parties, you can't by law involve yourself in the specifics. The board has only one employee, the superintendent.

6. Consider the goals of the A+ Coalition, listed on the attached cover letter; do you believe those are achievable goals? Why or why not? Are any of particular importance to you? Why?

I think all of the goals listed by the A+ Coalition are achievable.

The Natchitoches Parish School Board can not do this alone. It will take the community and community organizations to rally around the schools and the system to ensure students that may not have a stable home life receive the opportunity to succeed.

Several of the goals are of particular interest to me:

Zero C, D and F schools in the district.

We must improve in all areas, school system, community support and truancy enforcement to move to this level.

More than 50% of students should graduate with some form of dual enrollment credit. Not every child will go to college. College credits in high school are a key to some student's future. We must partner with the technical college to provide learning systems such as industrial electrician, for our students during their senior year. At present we do have the advanced manufacturing program. As a HR Manager at Weyerhaeuser, we struggled to find qualified industrial electricians.

95% graduation rate.

We must have a trained educated workforce to attract business and industry to Natchitoches.

I would like to thank the A+ Coalition for the opportunity to participate in this process. This is truly what a partnership should be and will lead to great things moving forward.

I appreciate the A+ Coalition's interest and investment in the future of our parish.