

2018 - A+ Coalition – School Board Candidate Questionnaire

Jed Cain
District 11 Candidate

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

I am one of five current owners of the law firm of Herman, Herman & Katz, LLC based in New Orleans. Our firm, like most businesses, operates on a budget that includes a variety of revenue sources and expenditures that vary from case to case or year to year. We routinely discuss, debate and ultimately decide upon budgets for a given case and/or fiscal year. During that process we gather necessary information from outside sources, review information from our internal accounting department, consult with our outside accounting firm, and question the data provided. Compromises and tough choices have to be made with a disciplined focus on our firm's values and business objectives.

If elected to the school board, I will utilize a similar approach in working through the school system's budget. Ultimately, we need a budget that advances our objectives, within our means, while adhering to our community values.

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?

There is no more conservative principle than supporting a locally controlled school system. Traditionally conservative voters/taxpayers in parishes such as St. Tammany, Livingston, Bossier, etc. have embraced this principle and funded high performing systems that help keep their communities prosperous and safe.

Over the past year Natchitoches has made national headlines for its high rate of poverty and an unthinkable violent crime. A strong school system is an important tool in combatting those issues over the long term.

I think the reluctance by some in Natchitoches to support bond issues or public school spending has less to do with conservative principles and more to do with a fundamental lack of confidence in the board. The new board will have to work hard to restore confidence by offering basic competency, communication, cooperation and civility. I also think the board should explore implementing new technologies that allow for increased financial transparency as way of regaining the trust of taxpayers. See www.lafayettecheckbook.com.

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.

I think it is counterproductive to look backwards with judgment over what the district has done “well” or “poorly.” That analysis will not change where we find ourselves today. In my opinion, the more productive exercise is to discuss where we go from here.

I think the board should remain committed over the next four years to the grade banding experiment. Administrators, teachers and students need our commitment to consistency and our patience as the experiment hopefully improves student performance.

I think the board needs to continue working towards improving our busing system. Natchitoches is the largest geographical parish in the state. The challenges of our geography are only accentuated by the consolidation of schools into a tighter radius within the city limits. We need to strive for the most sophisticated and efficient busing system in the state.

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?

Where consensus can be achieved for the benefit of the kids and taxpayers of Natchitoches Parish, I will be a good partner with administrators and fellow board members. I suspect that will be the case 95% of the time.

However, where our interests diverge, I will be a relentless advocate for the families of District 11. Decisions made by the school board have the potential to strengthen or weaken the communities of Natchitoches Parish. The parish needs a strong District 11 for a number of reasons, most notably:

- a. Our robust agricultural industry has been a stabilizing force in the parish’s economy for centuries.
- b. Our history and culture are consistently used as the centerpiece for the tourism industry that helps stabilize the parish’s economy.
- c. The majority of the mileage of the parish’s most prized natural/economic resource, Cane River, runs through the communities of District 11.

District 11 is one of the most marketable areas for future economic growth in the parish. Weakening these communities for short term economic gain is dangerously short sighted. If elected, acts by the board that have the potential of disproportionately weakening our communities will be met with an aggressive and more effective opposition. Now, more than ever, District 11 needs a strong and effective voice on the school board.

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?

My role would be to advise them of the proper chain of command and encourage them to work through that process.

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 hope so.

I think to some extent the letter grades of our schools are a moving target that are dependent upon variables that may be beyond our control as it relates to changes in the rating system over time by the BESE board. Nevertheless, I would hope that under whatever rating system is in place, all Natchitoches Parish schools would be above average by 2026.

I am particularly interested in the goal of “50% mastery or better on 3-8 assessments.” I think achieving that goal would provide a firm foundation for long term student achievement in the parish.

While I support the goals of the A+ Coalition, I would encourage the Coalition to continue thinking creatively about how it can help provide public school children with extracurricular opportunities to explore art, music and other creative outlets that were once a more prominent part of public education. I think part of supporting this initiative is helping fill in the gaps created by an increased focus on preparing students for standardized tests. I think the Coalition’s Promote the Vote Art Contest is a great start.