

Q&A with Berkeley County School Board candidates

Candidates

	1 What is the Berkeley County School District's biggest strength?	2 What is the district's biggest weakness? How would you improve it?	3 Is there enough communication among the School Board, Berkeley County Council and developers when new subdivisions and housing projects are approved? If not, what changes need to be made?	4 How should the district finance construction of new schools in the future, given that the installment financing method is no longer an option? Would you support an attempt at a referendum asking voters to raise taxes to build more schools?
 <p>District 3 Jackie Tillman Full-time homemaker</p>	Berkeley County is blessed with top-notch students and educators as well as parents who are willing to get involved and help the children and the schools. Additionally, we have a terrific group of businesses and industries that also provide assistance and support to our schools and students.	Communication. I believe there's not enough communication between the district and the public regarding the various programs taking place throughout the county. I would try to bridge this gap by utilizing our local media outlets. We could do a better job of communicating the various positive achievements and awards received.	I don't believe there can ever be too much communication when dealing with the growth of an area. It is imperative that the school district ensures they continue to be aware of and knowledgeable about all development plans for our county at the earliest possible stages.	I believe that whatever method is used, it should be explained in its entirety to the community as well as the reasoning as to why. If the only possible way to finance new schools is through increased taxes, then I definitely believe the taxpayers should have the opportunity to vote.
 <p>District 3 Phillip Obie II Santee Cooper employee</p>	The county's biggest strength is our teachers. Their dedication, devotion, and commitment to teaching our students are unquestionable and they are the greatest resource we have and the best any school district could ask for.	Planning for growth is the districts biggest weakness. With the rapid growth we are experiencing here in Berkeley County, the School Board needs to work with County Council and get developers to set aside land and help pay for new schools in these areas.	No, the School Board and County Council need to have a closer working relationship. With this partnership and shared concern in the county's overall best interest we can better plan for and meet the county's growth and get developers to set aside land in new developments for schools.	I would support a referendum asking the voters' input before raising taxes to build new schools. It is important to plan for the future now and set aside money and put pressure on the state government for funding to support our public schools and their growth.
 <p>District 3 Norman Kinsey Retired, Charleston Naval Shipyard</p>	The Berkeley County parents that work so hard to ensure their children are getting the best education possible.	The state's ruling that does not allow the district to discipline students properly.	No. These groups should have to get together and determine what is needed to provide schooling for these developments, and how the money will be raised.	I don't know (how the district should finance construction of new schools.) Yes (would support a referendum.)
 <p>District 5 Jim Royce Biology instructor at Trident Tech</p>	Our teachers. Bless the hearts and souls of our teachers as they enter their classrooms every day. They give of themselves mentally, physically and financially to help their students achieve. The Lord knows we need them and their expertise and they need our support.	The financial management of our school system is and has been our greatest weakness. There are layers of administrative redundancy that need to be eliminated. Therein lies an abundance of funds that could be funneled into classrooms and teacher resources. A new superintendent implementing zero-based budgeting will solve this problem.	No. There is shared responsibility for this lack of communication. County council is focused on growth and infrastructure. We are focused on teaching children. Communications will improve when we have similar goals. Then, impact fees, school property agreements and infrastructure (roads, water, sewage) need to be on the table.	I will not support a tax increase. Citizens supported a \$192 million referendum in 1999. The board then ripped these people off for another \$200 million, without their vote, using installment financing. Plus, the student population is just now reaching the numbers we had prior to the 1996 Navy base closure.
 <p>District 5 Gayla McSwain Lawyer</p>	It's teachers. For the past seven years, Berkeley County teachers have taught my children, and I have attended numerous School Board meetings. The majority of teachers continue to care greatly about the children's education despite overcrowded classrooms and "red tape." I applaud them all.	Too many students per classroom. Berkeley County's children come from every kind of family and socioeconomic background imaginable. We must enable the teachers to approach teaching in a customized fashion. We can only make that happen if we reduce the ratio of students per teacher.	More communication is needed among County Council, the School Board, and developers before County Council approves new housing developments. Council could ensure that development does not have a negative impact on our schools by appointing a liaison to consult with the board and the developers before approving new housing.	Raising taxes might not be necessary. First, the budget should be zero-based to eliminate waste and redirect funds. Next, to eliminate unfair competition for economic development, Dorchester, Berkeley and Charleston county councils could require developers to pay the same impact fee prior to receiving approval to build a new subdivision.
 <p>District 5 Kathy Schwalbe Educator, small business owner</p>	A decade ago, the board made the hard decision to support a facility program that would build new schools and upgrade existing ones. When renovations are completed, all schools can boast of instructional environments that can support current and emerging technology and innovation. We can't afford to lose that focus.	There's disconnect with state government in general and with our local delegation, in particular. The board needs to do a better job of advocacy at both levels to assure that those making decisions regarding public education understand its value and supports its needs. I'm committed to building relationships that work.	Communication is key to building relationships among the board, county government and developers to affect responsible decisions. Each of these entities can do more to plan for the future of our schools by using existing facilities (and any planned for future) in the most efficient ways possible.	Districts are at the mercy of the state to address building needs, so this legislative session will be telling. I support the local voice of a referendum and the massive communication effort with tax payers that will be needed if that is the route we must take.
 <p>District 7 Winston D. Williams Business education teacher, Kingstree</p>	One strength I see is that the school district has accepted its position as a district that is growing and that it is willing to make the decisions it needs to better serve its students, and staff.	With a school district with 27,500 students and 38 schools I would imagine there are challenges, however, I do not believe one stands out more than another. What I would bring to this position would be a teamwork philosophy centered on forward progress of Berkeley County Schools.	I would expect there would be sufficient dialogue because housing project approvals will ultimately impact the school district in regards to new construction and/or renovations. Growth, and the infrastructure to support that growth, is not a unique challenge to Berkeley County and communication between organizations must remain a priority.	New schools will have to be built, if data on projected population growth prove correct. The topic of financing school construction is complex; I would like to evaluate other financing methods first before giving my support to any referendum to raising taxes.
 <p>District 7 Wilhelmina S. Moore Teacher, Williamsburg Co.</p>	I think the biggest strength of the district is they're trying to see that all of the schools are safe.	The biggest weakness I feel is maybe some overcrowded classes and I would hope we would improve it by hiring new teachers, and maybe hire some assistants to help with behavior.	No, I feel we need improvements in that area. Much improvement. I would limit the amount of housing development and, again, I would do mass improvements in special education because I think every child can become a productive citizen if given the proper training.	They have some other means of funding, I figure. (Would support a referendum) if they spell out what they're going to do with it, not just to raise it just to raise it. I have some schools in my district that need a facelift.
 <p>District 9 Donna Marino Small business owner</p>	Teachers are our biggest strength. Long before I was a board member, I was a school volunteer — a job I continue to love. I see what our teachers are doing. Those who constantly attack public education are doing a great disservice to folks who work tirelessly in the trenches.	I continue to be concerned with our graduation rate. There are a lot of factors that cause this statistic. As part of the School Board, I was able to help implement Star Academy, which focuses on overage children by giving them an opportunity to advance and eventually graduate.	We have seen improvement with communication with local government in the last two years. As a member of the Berkeley County School Board, I am proud of the communication with developers in the opening of Cane Bay High School.	The majority of our building needs have been addressed so that we will be able to address future needs with less impact on taxpayers. In terms of a referendum, I think it's essential citizens be given the opportunity to speak/vote, and I would support a referendum under the right circumstances.
 <p>District 9 Zonda Powell Church executive assistant</p>	The high-quality professional teachers and staff that are currently in the system.	Funding appears to be the greatest weakness. We need to research and determine methods that will provide funding to prepare our children for the modern economy and move forward in raising our national ranking from the bottom. We need to abandon the shameful standard of "minimally adequate" in education.	I think with better communication we could alleviate or completely forgo a great deal of problems that arise out of poor communication and planning between the groups. The groups need to meet prior to approving any housing projects and/or subdivisions to determine the education needs and costs to the community.	I will not support raising taxes. I will, however, study all funding methods and options available to ensure that we have safe, secure schools. I will listen to the concerns of my constituents.
 <p>District 9 Bob Stukes Retired educator</p>	The strengths of Berkeley County School District are their teachers and students.	The weaknesses of the district are low graduation rates, high student dropouts, wasted taxpayers money and not enough technological and vocational courses. I'd propose intervention plans to target high-risk students toward vocational courses and on-the-job training. All budgets would be scrutinized more to save taxpayers money for programs that work.	There's not enough communications with council when it comes to taxes for schools and the unbridled growth in the county. Developers would need to donate land for future schools, and impact fees (could) be provided to subsidize schools to cut down on unnecessary taxes for people on fixed incomes.	Referendums, impact fees and student fees, only when the process is open and honest. Raising taxes would be our last resort.