



League of Women Voters® of Montgomery County

2009 Voter's Guide

The Montgomery County School Board

Introduction

The Voter's Guide is provided by the League of Women Voters of Montgomery County as part of the League's commitment to voter services and as a public service. The League of Women Voters is a non-partisan organization, and the inclusion of candidates' statements in this Guide does not represent an endorsement of any one candidate or position.

The Guide is organized by race and by candidate. Each candidate's responses include the materials submitted for the candidate survey and written responses to the questions asked during the School Board candidate forum, held on October 1. Candidates were invited to extend their forum answers if they so wished.

Participation in the candidate survey, the candidate forum, and the subsequent responses were optional and candidates were under no obligation to answer any or all of the question.

Montgomery County School Board (District A)

Phyllis T. Albritton

Biographical Statement: Born: Binghamton NY; Lived in Boston MA, Charlottesville VA, Evanston IL, Louisville KY, New York NY, St. Louis MO, Vienna, Austria, Washington DC. 1962 established programs for low-income children: Churchwomen's Preschool Experience in Charlottesville VA when VA had not public kindergartens; after-school tutorials in MO and Charlottesville; summer program in MO. Helped found Boys and Girls Clubs of NRV and Valley Interfaith Child Care Center. Positions: Local president; VP for programs; District Director (Carroll, Floyd, Galax, Giles, Grayson, Montgomery, Patrick, Radford); SW Regional VP, VA Congress of PTA's. : MCPS At Risk Task Force, member of Pre-School Subcommittee. VP: League of Women Voter Charlottesville/Albemarle. Currently: Financial Advisor, Wells Fargo Advisors. Married to Clark Webb; Have two children, a step-daughter, foster son, and three grandchildren. being with family and friends, dancing, playing the piano, reading, swimming, walking in the woods. , Northwestern University, Evanston IL; Advanced Secretarial Degree from

Katharine Gibbs Secretarial School, Boston MA. : Central America, Europe, Middle East, Nigeria, USSR since 1954.

What do you see as the single most pressing issue facing the Montgomery County Public Schools, and what, specifically would you do to address or solve this issue? Finances is our biggest issue. With the lack of moneys from the state; with no certainty of continuous stimulus money; with Montgomery County being able to tax only real estate, I believe we must build our school system's Montgomery County Educational Foundation to start raising moneys for programs that need funding.

Montgomery County has a large number of school buildings which are currently or will soon be no longer in use, are under utilized, or have been decommissioned. What should be done with the school structures that are either no longer in use, are slated to be closed in the near future, or that have been decommissioned? Montgomery County has a large number of school buildings which are currently or will soon be no longer in use, are under utilized, or have been decommissioned. What should be done with the school structures that are either no longer in use, are slated to be closed in the near future, or that have been decommissioned? Old Blacksburg Middle School: As soon as a contract is signed for the new Prices Fork Elementary School, the Montgomery County Board of Supervisors, who owns the area, will determine what to do with the facility. Old Shawsville Middle School: This school is owned by the school system, which has plans to raze the building and use the grounds as an extension of the adjacent school. Cost to tear down the building is not cheap.

What should be the School Board's priorities in terms of capital projects? Currently priorities are Eastern Montgomery Primary/Elementary School and Prices Fork Elementary School. I believe our future needs are Auburn Middle School and Blacksburg High School.

1. Opening Statement. The opening statement was based on the three questions each of you were asked for the voter's guide. Please feel free to revise and extend your remarks. Given that online responses do not require the services of a printer, your remarks may be as long as you wish to make them. Our single most pressing issue is finances. I would like to see a coalition formed across the commonwealth to press to raise taxes on alcohol and tobaccor, with such moneys going to education. I am glad that our school system has the Montgomery County Education Foundation and I want to see this grow for the use of system so we can offer a variety of opportunities to our students and staff.

2. What can the School Board do to get all citizens, not just parents, involved with the School Board and the school system? Encourage people, including VA Tech students, to get involved volunteering in all of our schools and joining school system committees when structured for community membership. Continue to encourage businesses to partner with the school

system. Encourage people to come into the schools to share their stories. Help citizens realize that we have a foundation to which they can contribute.

3. Would you support year-round school as a method of achieving highest and best use of facilities and staff? I would want to have a study done on the pros and cons of year-round schooling. I have heard very good reports about year-round

4. Currently, times are very tight financially, yet research has shown that a quality teacher has the highest impact on student performance. Please discuss what priority you will place on employee compensation. Paying employees well is one of the most important priorities for our district.

5. What is your position on public funding for private schooling? Please address vouchers and tuition tax credits. I am opposed to public funding for private schooling, including vouchers and tuition tax credits. Until our public schools are fully funded, I see no reason to think of sharing public funds for private schooling.

6. How do you feel about same-sex classrooms? I have read pro's and con's about same-sex classrooms and would want a thorough study done before MCPS considered using same-sex classrooms.

7. What steps can the School Board take to encourage programs to try new methods? Do research first to find out how effective new methods are.

8. SOL's have been in the news lately. What steps should be taken to either change the process of evaluation or to better prepare students? With the numbers of young people dropping out of school several years before graduation, I am committed to all children reading at grade level at the end of 3rd grade, as future prison projections are made based on students NOT reading at grade level at the end of 3rd grade. Therefore, I believe we MUST be certain that all of our students moving from 3rd grade to 4th grade are reading at 3rd grade level.

9. Please identify the following:

1) The greatest strength of the Montgomery County Public Schools; Well qualified teachers and staff

2) The greatest weakness of the Montgomery County Public Schools; lack of adequate funding

3) The greatest opportunity for the Montgomery County Public Schools; prepare our students to be contributing citizens of the 21st century.

and 4) The greatest threat to the Montgomery County Public Schools. lack of funding

10. As neighborhoods age and other parts of the County grow, some schools experience lower enrollment, others are overcrowded. How do you address this problem? Redistricting is one of the most difficult decisions made by a school board, but our only option is to redistrict.

11. What can the County schools do to lower the drop-out rate? Having ALL students moving from 3rd grade to 4th grade reading at 3rd grade level.

12. Should the Montgomery County Public Schools expand technical education. If yes, what programs would you add?

Yes, especially more complex computer skills and abilities and training that would help young people move into the jobs available in our community, working with our local businesses to know what our students need..

13. How can the schools provide more support for non-English speaking (English as a Second Language) children? Encourage volunteers to come into the schools to help non-English speaking children.

14. Do you support foreign language classes for elementary students (K-5)? Absolutely.

15. Given the state budget and the potential for budget cuts at the local level, name one possible budget cut you would be willing to support, and one program or expenditure you feels should be off-limits. One area we could possibly cut is supplies; Salaries should not be cut.

16. What do you feel is the most important issue in health and physical education classes grades 6-8 and 9-12. How would you address the issue? Children need exercise and I believe we need to be sure our students have the opportunity for such during the school day.

George R. Stills

Biographical Statement: I am a native of Pittsylvania County, Virginia. I also have family ties to Montgomery county, particularly Blacksburg and Virginia Tech. My grandmother is a Blacksburg native and my grandfather is a Civil Engineering Alumni. I have always considered this an extended home and I am excited to now be living here am a 1999 Tunstall High School Graduate. I attended Campbell University in North Carolina for my undergraduate and master's degree. I hold dual undergraduate degrees in French Education and Religious Studies. My Master's degree is a Master of Arts Degree in Christian Education. During this same time I worked for Campbell University as the Director for Community Living and Standards. It was while at Campbell that I developed my passion for education. leaving Campbell University in 2006, I attended Virginia Commonwealth University. I have 30 hours of coursework in Social Work and interned at the Richmond Department of Social Work. It was at VCU, that I realized I wanted to have a larger impact than direct practice. In 2007, I transferred to Virginia Tech to pursue a more research oriented degree. I am currently a PhD student in the Sociology Department. My research interests are: Work, Gender, Inequality, and Family. It is my hope to teach at a university while remaining politically active. I really strive to make an impact in my community. past two years, I have taught at Blacksburg High School in the Foreign Language Department. This experience has shown me the importance of including front line educators and families in the decision making process. Having served three years as a staff member at Campbell and being involved in the planning process, I realize the importance of making sure those we are serving have all they need to be successful. This is why I decided to run for school board. I am looking to help impact the decision making process and make sure we truly represent those that elect us.

What do you see as the single most pressing issue facing the Montgomery County Public Schools, and what, specifically

would you do to address or solve this issue? I see better fiscal responsibilities as our most pressing issues facing the county. I would like to see schools and the school system better use funds. As a teacher, I have seen a lot of wasteful spending. I would like for there to be more accountability for how money was spent and also how facilities are used. There are a few buildings that are not being maximized or even used at all, particularly the old middle school, but still county funds are being expended by the school system and county.

Montgomery County has a large number of school buildings which are currently or will soon be no longer in use, are under utilized, or have been decommissioned. What should be done with the school structures that are either no longer in use, are slated to be closed in the near future, or that have been decommissioned? First, I think better forward planning on the part of the county and school system is really important. Blacksburg Middle School is a prime example. Discussions about the future of that building should have been occurring prior to decommissioning it and letting the building deteriorate for more than ten years before the building has been turned over to the Town of Blacksburg and Montgomery County Administrators to decide the future of this building. also think that in a time of limited resources and maximizing the use of facilities is extremely important. Price's Fork Elementary is the next building slated to be built. I think finding ways of adding on to this building or a plan for the building once it is decommissioned is important before anything is done with the land purchased for this project. High School is also slated to be either remodeled or moved to another site. I know that additional land has been purchased near the new Blacksburg Middle School potentially for this building. However, I feel that maintaining the current site and building on would be a better use of funds. The facility still is in good shape. Having worked there for two years, I see the need for additional classroom and common space but I think these can be addressed at the current site and eliminate the need for a new building and keep this school in the community it serves.

What should be the School Board's priorities in terms of capital projects? I feel that I have explained most of this in the previous answer but I think dealing with school overcrowding is a major priority. Price's Fork Elementary, Blacksburg High School, and Auburn High School all are over capacity. These should be the first priority for the School Board. In a time of budget cuts and fiscal shortfalls, I feel that renovating as much as possible and maximizing the current space should be the first priority. These buildings need attention immediately and I think that we must be creative in finding ways of addressing these problems without making the quick choice, which leaves the county with more facilities that are not in use or underused.

1. Opening Statement. The opening statement was based on the three questions each of you were asked for the voter's guide. Please feel free to revise and extend your remarks. Given that online responses do not require the services of a printer, your remarks may be as long as you wish to make them. Three most pressing issues:

Better fiscal responsibility: I would like to see schools and the school system better use funds. As a teacher, I have seen a lot of wasteful spending. I would like for there to be more accountability for how money was spent and also how facilities are used. There are a few buildings that are not being maximized or even used at all; yet county funds are being expended by the school system for new facilities.

Teacher/Parent/Student involvement in the decision process:

The past two years I have seen numerous decisions made with direct effect to line workers without any feedback or involvement of teachers or parents in the process.

Increase pay and benefits for employees. In order to make Montgomery County more competitive, we must find ways of ensuring employee their positions, increase salaries and also maintain competitive benefit packages.

Capital Improvement Plan:

First looking at the current building program, I think better forward planning on the part of the county and school system is really important. Blacksburg Middle School is a prime example. Discussions about the future of that building should have been occurring prior to decommissioning it and letting the building deteriorate for more than ten years before the building has been turned over to the Town of Blacksburg and Montgomery County Administrators to decide the future of this building.

I also think that in a time of limited resources and maximizing the use of facilities is extremely important. Price's Fork Elementary is another building slated to be built. I think finding ways of adding on to this building or a plan for the building once it is decommissioned is important before anything is done with the land purchased for this project.

Blacksburg High School is also slated to be either remodeled or moved to another site. I know that additional land has been purchased near the new Blacksburg Middle School potentially for this building. However, I feel that maintaining the current site and building on would be a better use of funds. The facility still is in good shape. Having worked there for two years, I see the need for additional classroom and common space but I think these can be addressed at the current site and eliminate the need for a new building and keep this school in the community it serves.

Also Auburn High School is another example. The school system just invested money in placing air conditioning units in every classroom. There is a need in this facility for additional instruction space. It is important to thoughtfully consider whether or renovate or build a new building. I feel that with the money that has been invested in this space, there is a need to continue to use this facility in some capacity even if the high school is moved.

I take very strong objections to the "throw away" building philosophy. The school system/county needs to ensure that tax revenue is being maximized. There are several specialized programs that the county could use these smaller buildings to fund. These could include more vocational training to help non-college bound students prepared for the workforce. Another option would be an alternative program to help students' transition from alternative (behavioral) placements. This program would target helping these students through alternative style instruction and more individual educational programs that may focus more on the liberal arts. This style of program has been shown to be effective in helping mainstream children with behavioral problems.

2. What can the School Board do to get all citizens, not just parents, involved with the School Board and the school system? It is extremely important that the entire community be involved in decision-making process. Every citizen over 18 pays taxes and therefore has a small stake in education. It is important to be innovative and find ways of tapping into the talents of our

entire community. Finding ways that citizens can be involved in education and also the decision-making process is important. A few ways to engage additional people would be using non-traditional sources; i.e. twitter, facebook, etc. I also would like to add to the volunteer involvement in the school system. I would like to create additional volunteer pools that would allow for additional citizen involvement.

3. Would you support year-round school as a method of achieving highest and best use of facilities and staff? I have seen great success with year-round schools in other school systems. Research shows that it is particularly successful for elementary school students. These studies show that it helps increase student performance on test scores and helps reduce time spent on revision and “what students lose over the summer.” It also is extremely important to make sure that programs meet the context. Before I would recommend a year-round program, I would want to study it in greater detail. We need to make it will work in our context, particularly given the amount of students whose families primary source of income still is agribusiness. I also would like to look at the costs associated with such programs and have discussions with their school boards about the cost/benefit analysis of such programs.

4. Currently, times are very tight financially, yet research has shown that a quality teacher has the highest impact on student performance. Please discuss what priority you will place on employee compensation. As a former teacher, I think it is extremely important that we look at ways of better compensating our employees. When you look at salaries in counties like; Pulaski, Salam, and Roanoke, it becomes apparent the need to further look at this problem. I would like to see Montgomery County as a leader in Southwest Virginia in employee pay and compensation. In the budget cuts last year, we cut positions and forced full-time employees to travel to keep their positions. I feel that this is not the best use of resources and puts a strain on the relationship with employees. It also negatively affects morale. I think we need to scrutinize the budget and find ways of making sure we take care of our employees.

5. What is your position on public funding for private schooling? Please address vouchers and tuition tax credits. This has recently become one of the most pressing issues facing public schools. I do not support using public funds for private education. I am committed to the funding of public schools. Public funds should go to public education. There are other ways of making public schools more competitive. This cannot be done if we remove additional funding from already taxed school systems. In a time where we have to do more with less, we cannot afford to lose this additional money. It is extremely difficult for public schools and systems to compete with private organizations and their endowments. It also removes the ability for public schools to be competitive in this global market.

6. How do you feel about same-sex classrooms? There is research that supports same-sex classrooms particularly for at-risk males. I would support programs that use same-sex as a means of addressing specific developmental/behavioral issues. However, I do not support same-sex classrooms. As a feminist, I feel that we have extreme problems with sexism in the United States. Separating students by sex would continue to perpetuate sexism. I think it is extremely important that we continue to breakdown these barriers and help all students be successful. This is really

important for elementary and middle school students. This is the time that a great deal of develop occurs and it is important that they develop appropriate models of interactions with the opposite sex.

7. What steps can the School Board take to encourage programs to try new methods? The School Board should be extremely supportive of new methods. Innovation in teaching is important to the future of education. Many traditional methods; i.e. lecture; have been shown to be ineffective for most students. We as a school system should support and reward teachers that are innovative and successful in reaching their students. I also would like to establish a fund that would help teachers get additional training and offer seed money to new innovative techniques and programs.

8. SOL's have been in the news lately. What steps should be taken to either change the process of evaluation or to better prepare students? I feel that school evaluation is extremely important. Teachers should be held accountable to the students and their parents to provide high quality education. However, the No Child Left Behind Act is not the answer. The test-based evaluation system is not an appropriate evaluation of how well schools are doing. Also, this legislation was introduced without any additional funding or help for low performing school. The current law further penalizes these low performing schools by removing their federal funding and making them choice schools. Since most poor performing schools also are in poor districts, this means that many at-risk students are left behind. We must find ways of holding teachers accountable without penalizing students. As the passing scores increases to 100%, many poor schools will continue to suffer. I strongly feel that we must find ways of providing additional support to at-risk schools and increase the quality of teachers. One way to address this would be to better compensate teachers. I also think that it is really important that there are curriculum standards that every school uses. These standards help ensure that every student learns the same thing at the same time. It helps to reduce the gap in learning that has been present between school systems. It is really important that we find a balance between accountability and being forced to teaching a test.

9. Please identify the following: 1) The greatest strength of the Montgomery County Public Schools; 2) The greatest weakness of the Montgomery County Public Schools; 3) The greatest opportunity for the Montgomery County Public Schools; and 4) The greatest threat to the Montgomery County Public Schools. Greatest Strength is the talent of our employees. I have been really impressed with the quality of staff in the Montgomery County Schools. I see them as a great asset that we need to tap more into as a school system. Also the fiscal foresight of Montgomery County not to get into the same crisis seen in other Southern Virginia counties is an asset. The greatest weakness is the community and teacher inclusion in decision-making process. We need to find ways of better including teachers and community members in the governance of our school system. Our greatest opportunity is to find ways to continue to make Montgomery County stand out as a place of excellence. We have the potential and resources to be a leader in education in the state of Virginia. It is important to continue to focus on vocationally readiness. Our greatest threat is complacency. If we continue to sit and do the same things that we have done and not be ready and find ways of being competitive then the children will suffer. It is important that

we continue to be forward thinking and enacting change in the way we do things.

10. As neighborhoods age and other parts of the County grow, some schools experience lower enrollment, others are overcrowded. How do you address this problem? This is always a very unpopular topic. It is extremely difficult to address problems of enrollment. It is our responsibility to make sure that buildings are being utilized appropriately. We also cannot neglect to consider the impact on children. I think that being intentional in this process is the most important fact. I want to make sure that as we look at redistricting that we may sure to keep community and neighborhoods intact. It is really important that children are able to have the positive influences of friends while they are in school. One of the biggest priorities for me is that we are intentional in how we make our decisions and they carefully consider its impact on the community.

11. What can the County schools do to lower the drop-out rate? This is an important statistic about how well we are engaging students throughout their education experience. The on-time graduation rates and also dropout rates have been declining recently across the region. Montgomery County, however, continues to be the highest percentage at approximately 3%. We need to look at our school programs. Across the state and nation, we continue to be invested in the traditional liberal arts programs. We need to add and support existing vocational programs. It is really important to focus not only on the students that are attending college but also to help prepare others students for the workforce and independent living.

12. Should the Montgomery County Public Schools expand technical education. If yes, what programs would you add? In order for Montgomery County to be competitive in this global market, we need a strong technical education program. Not every student graduates with the intention of attending college. It is important that we have programs that help them prepare for employment or additional technical education. The areas of technical education that should be added are those, which focus on new advances in technology and also green programs. I am really pleased to hear about a trail compost program at Christiansburg High School. I think we need to find ways of increasing our green technology and training in schools. Technical education provides a viable alternative for many students choosing technical based higher education program and also those directly entering the workforce.

13. How can the schools provide more support for non-English speaking (English as a Second Language) children? ESL programs play an important role in our school system. These systems help many students adjust and be successful in our schools. It is really important that we continue to grow these programs across the county. As many new immigrants move into this region, these programs will help us address these challenges. If we do not make appropriate preparations, we will be caught in the same crisis that faced many North Carolina counties. I think it is extremely important that we engage with their entire families. The School system should partner with local colleges to provide ESL services for parents. This will help us better be able to communicate and work with this entire family.

14. Do you support foreign language classes for elementary students (K-5)? As a foreign language teacher, I fully support

these programs. Most of the language development occurs during this time period. It is important that we begin to teach additional languages early because it helps them acquire them later in life. I see this as one way that we can make our county more competitive. We live in a world were many high-paying jobs require traveling to other countries. It is important that students have foreign language skills to be competitive for these jobs.

15. Given the state budget and the potential for budget cuts at the local level, name one possible budget cut you would be willing to support, and one program or expenditure you feels should be off-limits. One of my top three priorities is increased fiscal responsibility. Better using our resources will help the school system to have the necessary funds is important. Eliminating unnecessary expenditures are one major way to address the budget cuts. Particularly, maximizing building usage, addressing unnecessary energy consumption, looking at supply budgets, engaging in more green activities, etc. will help to ensure the county has the funding necessary to better compensate teachers. I think keeping quality teachers should be one of our first priorities. This represents the major ways that I would like to address budget cuts. Maintaining current staff and employee salaries are areas that are off-limit. I also would personally wave the stipend that is a part of the School Board appointment to show my commitment to staff.

16. What do you feel is the most important issue in health and physical education classes grades 6-8 and 9-12. How would you address the issue? Creating a holistic physical education program is extremely important. The childhood obesity and diabetes numbers speak for themselves. There is a significant problem in the way we teach and parent. We, first, need to address the types of food that is served in the cafeteria. We must commit to a healthy, quality menu that will help curve the McDonaldization of our children. We also must augment our physical education and health programs in our schools. We must teach children about appropriate portions, healthy diets, and appropriate exercise. Physical Education has been an area that has been tragedy of the SOL system. The time spent in PE has been reduces and the quality of PE is not what we remember as children. I also see teaching proper nutrition and health early as important. The only way to address this problem is to address it in elementary schools before the bad habits are formed.

Montgomery County School Board (District C)

Drema Foster (write-in)

Biographical Statement: I am a 39 year old lifelong resident of Montgomery County. I grew up in Ironto and attended Shawsville Elementary, Middle and High Schools where I graduated at the age of 16 in 1986. I started working at Virginia Tech in April of 1986 and have been there since. I am currently employed as the Hotel Controller at The Inn at Virginia Tech and Skelton Conference Center. When my husband, Tim, and I were married in 1990, I moved to the Alleghany Springs section of Shawsville and have lived there since. We have one son, J.T., who is six years old and a first grader at Shawsville Elementary school. We have several nieces and nephews who attend four different schools in the county. I am very excited about the opportunity to represent the residents of District C.

What do you see as the single most pressing issue facing the Montgomery County Public Schools, and what, specifically would you do to address or solve this issue? The single most pressing issue in my opinion is the current economic conditions. With my experience in budget and financial planning I feel I would be able to provide valuable input in this area. It's hard to tackle important issues such as overcrowded classrooms and teacher to student ratios without the funding to address these issues.

Montgomery County has a large number of school buildings which are currently or will soon be no longer in use, are under utilized, or have been decommissioned. What should be done with the school structures that are either no longer in use, are slated to be closed in the near future, or that have been decommissioned? With the current economic conditions, I realize some of these options are not feasible; however, I would like to see some of the vacant facilities turned in to "specialty" schools such as college prep or vocational education. There is also a great need for practice gyms and ball fields in the county. With the growing rate of childhood obesity, keeping children physically active should be a priority. The consistent complaint I hear from parents and students across the county is MCPS focuses on the special needs and gifted students and those who fall outside those two categories are left behind. Having facilities such as vocational education or college prep where every student could get the attention they deserve would give each student a better opportunity to succeed.

What should be the School Board's priorities in terms of capital projects? In my opinion we need to look at Auburn Middle and High schools. These schools are old and overcrowded.

Montgomery County School Board (District D)

Jamie M. Bond

Biographical Statement: My name is Jamie Bond, I am a native of Christiansburg. I Graduated from Christiansburg High School in the career and Technical field of Cosmetology, in which I have practiced for 25 years. I am the owner operator of a business for 14 years here in Christiansburg. I have been married for 23 years to a lifelong resident. We have 3 wonderful children, 2 boys 19 and 15, and one girl 9. All 3 of our children have been very involved with extra curricular activities. My sons have also enjoyed the experience of our present career and Technical programs at Christiansburg High School. I presently hold the School Board seat for District D which include Christiansburg and Auburn Schools and am running again to be able to continue positive support for our Parents, Students, Teachers and all the Faculty that makes our School Systems a success for Students.

What do you see as the single most pressing issue facing the Montgomery County Public Schools, and what, specifically would you do to address or solve this issue? We have many classes that teach students life skills for living in today's society. Many of these skills are taught in our elective classes. An example of a class of this nature would be one that teaches applying for a job, dressing for a successful interview, and completing the resume. This class may also stress the importance of strong work ethic and the importance of maintaining a time schedule. Our students also need to learn basic knowledge of finance such as apply for a loan, interest rates and develop a household budget. I

would like this type class required for a standard diploma and would support action to move in this direction.

Montgomery County has a large number of school buildings which are currently or will soon be no longer in use, are under utilized, or have been decommissioned. What should be done with the school structures that are either no longer in use, are slated to be closed in the near future, or that have been decommissioned? Montgomery County Schools have been very successful in utilizing buildings for Rivendell, Phoenix and Independence Secondary. Montgomery County Public Schools should work closely with our Board of Supervisors as well as our citizens to develop comprehensive plans so that identified need within our county may be addressed in a financially responsible manner.

What should be the School Board's priorities in terms of capital projects? We are growing as a county and our some of our schools are experiencing overcrowding. Currently, the Shawsville-Elliston School is underway and hopefully we will be moving forward with a new Prices Fork Elementary. Next, plans are being developed to address the needs of the Auburn Community. I strongly support our efforts to continue moving forward with the goals articulated in our Facility Use and Space Study and update the goals and document as demographics and identified needs change within our county.

Leonard H. "Lenny" Sessions

Biographical Statement: I am proud to be "an ARMY Brat" born in Wurzburg, Germany. My family returned to the United States in 1958 and moved to Ft. Myer, VA in January 1960. We lived on the military base at Ft. Myer until my father was ordered to Vietnam in 1964. Following his safe return in 1965, my parents moved to the home where they currently reside in Arlington, VA. In 1972 I graduated from Wakefield High School in Arlington, VA. That fall I began my Bachelor's program at VA Tech in the College of Education as an Industrial Arts Education major. During the same year, the former Marilyn Morgan began her Bachelor's program at VA Tech in the College of Arts and Sciences as a Political Science major. We began dating our junior year at VA Tech, and were subsequently married on January 1, 1977. Marilyn and I are proud parents of two grown sons, Bryan and Brandon. My wife and I started our careers as professional educators over thirty years ago. I began teaching Industrial Arts at Cave Spring High School in 1978. Five years later, I transferred to Glenvar High School where I continued teaching Industrial Arts for an additional eight years. In 1988 I completed a Master's Degree program at VA Tech in Vocational Education with a minor in Secondary Administration. In addition, I am "All But Defended" for a Doctorate at VA Tech in Educational Leadership. In 1991 I became the Assistant Principal at Blacksburg Middle School. After five years at BMS, I accepted a two-year grant funded position at the Montgomery County School Board Office for Truancy and Dropout Prevention/ Retrieval for grades six through twelve. In 1998 I returned to Christiansburg Middle School as an Assistant Principal. One year later I opened Auburn Middle School as Principal where I remained for seven years. I am currently a Communications Officer with the VA Tech Police Department. Activities and Hobbies The morning wake-up DJ at WUVT-AM radio station at VA Tech from 1972 through 1975. VHSL Basketball Official for ten years. Life-long Woodworker. Avid Gardener/Landscaper. Stained Glass Artist. Collecting Antique Tools and Pocket Knives.

What do you see as the single most pressing issue facing the Montgomery County Public Schools, and what, specifically would you do to address or solve this issue? In my opinion, the most pressing issue facing MCPS is protecting jobs in light of increasing fiscal uncertainty. In anticipation of minimal, if any, increase in local revenue, the absence of federal stimulus incentives, and a significant decrease in state funds for education, the School Board should provide leadership in the following points of emphasis: 1. The School Board must look at pupil-teacher ratios at every school throughout the division to ensure fair and equitable teaching assignments and utilization of other human resources. 2. The School Board must reduce our energy consumption in both facilities and transportation. 3. Every new construction or renovation project must incorporate some form of "Green Technology" in order to moderate our existing operational costs and reduce our "environmental footprint". 4. The School Board must continue to support co-curricular and extra-curricular activities while considering how to make them more self-sustaining. 5. Finally, all new School Board initiatives will have to be grant funded.

Montgomery County has a large number of school buildings which are currently or will soon be no longer in use, are under utilized, or have been decommissioned. What should be done with the school structures that are either no longer in use, are slated to be closed in the near future, or that have been decommissioned? The old Price's Fork Elementary building can be converted to a community center and museum dedicated to capturing and commemorating the coal-mining communities of McCoy and Wake Forest while providing additional recreational real estate for Parks and Recreation. The completion of the renovation and construction project in the Auburn community will more than likely not include the existing Auburn Middle School building. Riner is the lone remaining community without a public library and community center. I believe a cooperative effort between the School Board and the Board of Supervisors to convert the existing Auburn Middle School building into a public library and community center will have similar results to that of the Meadowbrook conversion project in Shawsville. The existing Shawsville Elementary building should be sold to the Cardinal Police Academy as a training facility. The Academy initially requested the use of the old Shawsville Middle School facility for the same purpose. I believe the old Shawsville Elementary building is more suitable to this type activity while providing easy access off Route 460. The unanticipated surge in new home construction throughout Christiansburg will force the School Board to re-evaluate its attendance lines within the near future. Utilization of vacated and decommissioned buildings in Christiansburg cannot be determined until this question is resolved.

What should be the School Board's priorities in terms of capital projects? 1. Completion of the new Elliston and Price's Fork Elementary Schools. 2. Construction and renovation project of Auburn High School and Auburn Middle School. 3. Renovation of an existing facility for an Achievement Center for the Arts and Applied Technologies.

Opening Statement. I spent the last twenty-five years interacting in various capacities with the Montgomery County School Board. I know first-hand that the school board has a long-standing commitment to its employees, parents, and patrons to work diligently to close the disparity between the local teacher compensation versus the state average compensation rates. The

school board and the local education association have worked tirelessly to bring people together to address this issue. However, we must also face the fact that we are in an era of economic uncertainty, and must be included in our thought process. Meeting the goal of closing the disparity in compensation must also be coupled with maintaining the teaching positions, support personnel positions, and administrative personnel that we currently have serving the various communities throughout the school division.

These two goals must be a primary focus as we move forward. As the country and the Commonwealth of Virginia embark on economic recovery, we must then be good stewards of the monies we have available so that we can, as the economic situation improves, maintain the public confidence that we will be able to move salaries forward, secure job positions, and increase the opportunities for people to remain as part of the Montgomery County Public Schools in a positive way.

In terms of how we might utilize existing facilities that are standing empty or possibly going to be decommissioned, we have a golden opportunity to renovate and utilize an existing free-standing facility to develop an "Achievement Center for the Performing and Related Arts and Applied Technologies. We have programs throughout the Montgomery County School system that have received state and national recognition in vocational and performing arts. I would like to see the system open an achievement center where more of our students could avail themselves of these type programs and great teachers. An achievement center would also prepare a workforce for new technologies and new industries as an encouragement to locate in the New River Valley.

Regarding our priorities for capital improvements, first of all we need to finish the great facilities started in Prices Fork and Elliston Lafayette. This too has been a long-standing commitment to both communities. Second, we need to look at the needs of the Auburn district. Finally, we need to look at the impact of the growing number of students that are now attending the Christiansburg schools.

What can the School Board do to get all citizens involved...

It has been recognized over the past several years that collaboration is the key to participation. I believe that if we validate our professionals in terms of their opinion, their experiences, and their innovative approach to meeting particular learning goals as we move through the K-12 continuum, we embody their presence and participation. If we incorporate the opinions of parents and patrons in decision-making activities, they are more likely to continue their level of participation. It's not a difficult question. It's one we have to be committed to.

I have observed this school board in years past utilize the power of their commitment to collaboration. Unfortunately, I believe it has gone by the wayside in recent years. However, we have an opportunity to regain that level of participation by once again validating our professionals and incorporating parents and patrons in the decision making process.

Would you support year-round schools... Having year-round schools is a concept that has been tried and fallen by the wayside and tried again. I don't know that year-round schools will give us as strong an outcome as one would anticipate. Students still need that time to revive and rejuvenate themselves, and to reconnect with their families and surrounding community. When we are in school during the most humid and hottest time of the year, it stresses our facilities, our human resources, and elevates our energy consumption to the point that I'm not sure we are going

to get the best results for what we are putting into it. I believe there are other ways and means of addressing student achievement, getting kids to stay in school, and getting students to graduate in a timely manner other than year-round schools.

...Discuss what priority you will place on employee compensation. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, employee compensation is what I would categorize as 1-A, and maintaining employee positions is 1-B. In terms of compensation, philosophically the thing that troubles me the most is that we limit our approach and our thinking to teacher compensation. I spent fourteen years as a classroom teacher and I understand the plight of teachers. I'm married to a teacher. We need to treat all of our employee groups as professionals. We have people who work as custodians, cafeteria workers and managers, classroom aides and assistants, and bus drivers who cannot avail themselves of benefits such as health insurance and leave compensation. We need to look at addressing this. If we treat everyone like a professional, that is a star in our crown in terms of recruiting others to come and join the ranks of the existing professionals. Therefore, in my opinion, compensation is 1-A, maintaining those existing positions is 1-B, and treating everyone like a professional is 1-C.

What is your position on public funding for private schooling?

I make no bones about it. I'm extremely passionate about public education. I'm a product of public education, my wife is a product of public education in the Commonwealth of Virginia, and my children came through Montgomery County Schools in public education. It can be questioned regarding the viability of vouchers and tax credits for providing options for parents. If you have an opportunity to pick up a copy of a book entitled, "The Manufactured Crisis", you'll find that it captures a mindset that there may be an underlying reason for promoting school vouchers, tax credits, and other kinds of programs that take away from public education.

I leave it to the audience to go and take a look at this book and think it through for yourselves. I again make no bones about it. I am a proponent of public education and firmly believe that the funds we are given through the Commonwealth of Virginia should be applied to those students that avail themselves to public education.

How do you feel about same-sex classrooms? There is research that I have specific knowledge of at the middle school level that scheduling same-sex classrooms in Math, Science, and Language Arts actually has a positive impact on student outcomes. I believe it is worthy of consideration by the school board in terms of our SOL scores and our AYP status. I'm not as familiar with the research at the elementary school level. I can say with confidence however, that there is research to support same-sex classrooms at least at the middle school level. At high school I don't believe there is as strong of an outcome as it is in the earlier grades. It is certainly worth taking a look at especially when we are looking at legitimate means of addressing the requirement to meet growing SOL and AYP standards.

What steps can the School Board take to encourage programs to try new methods?

Again, I'll allude to my opening remarks. I feel very strongly about the power of collaboration. It is a most powerful and underutilized tool in bringing people to consensus. If I come to the table with a single perspective on how to address a particular issue, and listen to the reaction of other participants with varying perspectives, I can test the validity of my own thinking. By listening to the perspectives of other participants, I can weigh my

beliefs and more effectively decide the merit of my own thinking. How do you get people to be receptive to differing opinions . . . you both solicit their participation in the decision-making process and you validate their opinion.

SOL's – What steps should be taken to either change the process or better prepare students? We all know the controversy that "No Child Left Behind" created. We also know that the goal by the year 2014 that every student will achieve at a rate of 100 % is as unrealistic as has ever been discussed. However, we must also recognize that there are "givens". There are state statutes that we are bound to at least make a legitimate effort to meet and subscribe to. There are federal mandates that we must comply with in order to receive necessary entitlement funds.

Then again, we all heard years ago, and have believed as veteran professionals, that good teaching is good teaching. The problem is finding the balance in supporting good teaching and being thoughtful in how we address the "givens". I believe we need to be steadfast in supporting good teaching. We must acknowledge that good teaching is not measured by student outcomes as measured by standardized testing. Good teaching is measured by student performance throughout the continuum. In achieving a balanced approach to teaching and learning, there continue to be "Givens". Within the imposed statutes and mandates there are guidelines that cannot be changed from within. We need to work at the state and federal level to institute systemic change, and continue to support good teaching in the Montgomery County schools.

Please identify the following: the greatest strength, the greatest weakness, the greatest opportunity, and the greatest threat...

Our greatest strength, in my opinion, is the people. Parents, patrons, students, and education professionals are all our greatest strength and our greatest asset. Our greatest weakness is a house divided. When we begin to fight among ourselves, or when we begin to not support one "strand" over another, or when we begin to say we are the "haves" versus the "have nots", we are at our weakest. I was part of the Montgomery County School system as an administrator when we heard a lot of that "stuff". It is truly our greatest weakness and our greatest opportunity for failure.

If you subscribe to the notion that it takes an entire village to raise a child, it must also take an entire school system working together to move that system forward. Our greatest opportunity is tomorrow. I don't know what tomorrow is going to bring for us as a system. I can say our greatest opportunity for success and to do right by our students has not yet materialized. Technology changes, the ability to maintain a strong and viable workforce changes, the availability of natural resources and the things that draw people to Montgomery County and the NRV changes day by day. The greatest opportunity is to be present and a part of that change.

Our greatest threat is apathy. If we sit by and are easily satisfied with what was, we'll continue to have what was. Instead of having the best opportunity for our students to go on and become productive citizens, or to go on and continue their education and then come back home to the NRV, we cannot be satisfied with what was.

...Some schools experience lower enrollment, others are overcrowded – how do you address this problem? It was always a running joke among my Principal colleagues that Principals rarely survive redistricting. I don't necessarily subscribe to that notion, but we always got a chuckle before we went into Superintendent's meeting by "whatever you do, don't bring up

changing your attendance zone”. Unfortunately, when you build a facility, the permanent structures rarely change. Population densities do change, and from what we have seen in most recent years, they are somewhat unpredictable. The predictions as to where our student population was expected to grow turned out to be slightly off. The prediction failed to anticipate how much growth would take place in Christiansburg. As a result, we are forced to address the changes in student population density by looking at changing attendance lines in order to balance our facilities’ use.

As you balance student attendance in a given strand, you more effectively and efficiently utilize facilities and human resources. With a balanced use of existing facilities and a balanced approach to teaching and learning, you ensure improved student outcomes. Approximately three months ago, school board members mentioned the possibility of having to take a look at attendance lines in Christiansburg. Realizing this is always a difficult task, it is one we will have to deal with in the near future.

What can the county schools do to lower the dropout rate? One of the things that my experience in working with dropout prevention and retention taught me was to understand that we need to work with families, not just the individual student. This means we need to work with the entire family unit, not just an individual student. We all recognize philosophically that success breeds success. However, it takes more than just a banner statement to address the problem of student retention. Montgomery County schools have strong alternative program offerings that operate outside the comprehensive school setting. These programs are a viable option for meeting the needs of an identified group of students who are on the borderline of failing.

I also believe that an enhanced approach to providing educational opportunities in the Related and Performing Arts and Applied Technologies is another legitimate approach to meeting the needs of our students based on their areas of interest. This is an essential building block of success in student outcomes and graduation rates.

Should Montgomery County Public Schools expand technical education? Absolutely. Yes, I support Vocational Education. After all, that’s home for me. I spent fourteen years as a vocational educator and dearly love the program. We have programs at Blacksburg and Christiansburg High Schools in vocational education that have received state and national recognition. I firmly believe there are more students than just those who attend our largest high schools that would love to be a part of one or more of these programs.

These programs promote innovative technologies that are now being looked at in a serious fashion under the banner of “green technologies”. Passive solar energy, residential construction of solar energy systems, geo-thermal energy, and alternative fuel systems for internal combustion engines offer exciting opportunities to get busy and do something. These innovative technologies provide opportunities in vocational education to meet the needs of a growing student population, and to become good stewards of our “Mother Earth”. Finally, an expanded program in vocational education will provide our school system with a rejuvenated sense of viability.

How can schools provide more support for non-English speaking children? I agree that we need to start exposing students as early as we can in the elementary grades to foreign language. This is a fundamental part of how we change the culture of our schools. We know that you achieve greater success in interpreting and utilizing a foreign language the earlier you start. In addition,

as our Hispanic community and other members of the international community settle into the NRV, the best way to engage them in the learning process is to make them a part of the learning process. After all, in elementary and middle school we don’t call the course offering “English”, we call it “Language Arts”. If, in fact, it is truly going to be a study of “Language Arts”, then let’s study more than just English, and utilize the combined study as an opportunity to respect and regard other cultures. We also have an opportunity for teachers and support personnel to learn different languages to more effectively serve their various communities as “life-long learners”.

Given the state budget – name one cut you would support, and one program that is hands-off. I would not cut positions. That statement is not limited to teaching positions. I’m referring to positions across the board. What I would look for is a balance in utilizing human resources. The school system spends an inordinate amount of money, for instance, paying itinerant teachers to travel from one school to another to offset growing or imbalanced pupil-teacher ratios in larger schools. Yet, there are schools where there are extremely small pupil-teacher ratios. Teachers with very small ratios could help offset the larger ratios without having to pay someone to travel to two, three, and sometimes four different schools every day. I call that duplication.

I don’t believe the first place the school board should start looking to cut a budget is in sports and extra-curricular activities. Research suggests that those students that participate in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities are more self-disciplined, and are more confident in developing group dynamics and leadership skills.