Voters’ Guide for 2020 Primary for the

MANATEE COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD

All registered voters in Manatee County are eligible to vote on all school board positions, regardless of the voter’s district. School board positions are nonpartisan, so all voters may vote, regardless of their party registration. In nonpartisan elections, if no candidate in a race gets greater than 50 percent of the vote in the primary, the top two vote-getters will face off in the general election in November.

**District 1**

Two candidates are running for the School Board District 1 position:

- Bridget Mendel  
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- Gina K. Messenger (the incumbent)  
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All registered voters may vote and results are final.

**District 3**

Five candidates are running for the School Board District 3 position:

- Scott G. Boyes  
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- Christine E. Dawson  
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- Mary K. Foreman  
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- Dave Watchdog Miner (the incumbent)  
  Page 7
- Richard A. “Rick” Murphy  
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Videos of candidate forums are available at:

https://lwvmanatee.org/videos/

Complete voting information is available at

https://www.vote411.org/
What qualities, experience and skills do you bring to this position?
My three boys attended the Manatee Public Schools for a total of 10 years. In that time, we had four Superintendents and two Interim Superintendents. As a long time educator in three different states with a MS Ed in Elementary Education I know the damage constant turnover of leadership can do to a district. I have a passion for protecting public ed, I study the legislative changes being made annually and I am not afraid to speak truth to power. I've attended board meetings for the last six years advocating on behalf of parent and students’ rights. Even with the numerous times I have been denied public records requests, I refuse to give up. I am tenacious when it comes to making sure our kids received a free and appropriate public education.

Why are you running for the Manatee County School Board?
I am running because there is no trust, truth, or transparency when it comes to our taxpayer dollars. Trust is in question with the cost overruns of $37 million dollars for an ERP system that still is not fully operable. Only 53% of our students are at or above grade level in reading yet the board rates our Superintendent Highly Effective and gives her a 10% bonus worth $20K while she is cooking the books, over inflating graduation rates and hiding low performing students in Horizons, an alternative school and our very own school to prison pipeline. There is no transparency when the board cherry picks the accounts the Citizen Auditors can examine and when the board can't reconcile the books for an entire school year with no explanation.

How do you propose our school system meet the challenge of providing an excellent education for our students?
We must address issues like poverty. The impact of poverty on academic achievement is significant. 26 of our 53 schools are Title 1 meaning that more than 40% of those students are in poverty. We can increase achievement by providing wraparound services like counseling, healthcare, childcare. When families are connected to support services, research shows that student achievement soars. This is important as COVID 19 forces more families into poverty due to job loss or illness. We must upgrade professional development for our teachers and replace aging instructional materials, moldy buildings with leaky roofs. We must stop grossly overpaying district administration and move money back into classrooms. Stop over testing and start teaching.

Do you see other areas where our school system should make improvements? How do you propose making those improvements?
We must improve bilingual education for our students who do not have English as their first language. Decades of research shows that when we immerse kids in English when they have not gained literacy skills in their native language then they become fluent in neither language making it more difficult to learn to read. This leads to failure and increased dropout rates. Investing in a 50/50 and 70/30 Two-Way Immersion Dual Language Magnet School would attract English speakers looking to learn Spanish too and increase achievement. Improvements can be made in the identification and proper remediation of students with Dyslexia. 1 in every 5 students has Dyslexia. 20% of our students in Manatee are not provided the proper instructional materials proven with research to remediate effectively. We must invest in Orton Gillingham, Wilson, Lindamood Bell, Cloud9, Seeing Stars, Book Share to help these students. A Dyslexia Magnet School based on model in Duval would improve academic achievement.
What qualities, experience and skills do you bring to this position?
As the Chairman of the School Board of Manatee County, I have shown that I am a good consensus builder and an excellent listener. I take the time to listen to each Board member and community member to find common ground that we can build upon as a team to create a strategic pathway forward. I have a degree in Elementary Education from UCF. I was born and raised in Manatee County, but I was a teacher in multiple counties in Florida. I am the only Board member or candidate that will have a child in our schools in August. In 2016 I ran on being budget focused. To ensure that I could live up to every promise I ran on, I took courses on school finance and Florida education funding offered by the Florida School Boards Association.

Why are you running for the Manatee County School Board?
I am running for re-election because the School District has made significant improvements and we need to ensure that we continue to move forward in a positive way. The District’s Bond rating was upgraded to an “A” rating. Improved financial planning has allowed for stability and reserves to grow. School grades have increased and so has the District’s ranking in the state. Over the past four years, new programs have become available to students including Entrepreneurship courses, Dual Language, and career technical training. We have opened three new schools, one of which is a new hurricane shelter. During my time on our School Board, we have seen student achievement improve, financial stability, and more opportunities for our students.

How do you propose our school system meet the challenge of providing an excellent education for our students?
My vision for Manatee County includes ensuring that all Manatee County students get a great education. When they graduate from the School District of Manatee County, they need to be ready for a career, technical training, or college. To do that, we need to attract and retain high-quality teachers, bus drivers, and school support staff. Families need choices to find a school that will best support their child and his/her needs, personality, and goals. We must ensure that our budget is focused on our students and ways to enrich their education here in Manatee County. We need to continue to move forward and that is why I am asking for your vote on August 18th.

Do you see other areas where our school system should make improvements? How do you propose making those improvements?
While the School District has been improving academically, I believe we need to continue to focus on all students reading on grade level. During my time on the Board, we have seen reading for third graders improve from 47% to 51% of students on or above grade level. These improvements have come from the School District’s strategic partnerships and thoughtful planning. Pre-K classes have expanded, which will help students gain the fundamental literacy skills needed to be successful readers. Innovative programs, such as the Dual Language program, have recently been added and will be expanded to better support students whose first language is not English. To ensure that the School District continues to focus on improving third grade reading, it has been reinforced in our new strategic plan. With this plan, the School District of Manatee County will deepen its commitment to all students by working with the community and adding specialized programs to increase grade level reading.
Scott G. Boyes

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What qualities, experience and skills do you bring to this position?

Qualities: Honesty, transparency, strategic, leads by example, approachable, calmness, levelheaded and makes informed decisions. Experience: B.A. Business Degree 69 college credits in education classes 7.5 years teaching experience in ESE, 5th, 4th grade and 2nd grade classrooms Principal at Samoset, Palma Sola and J.P. Miller for over 17 years. Skills: Collaborative, integrity, listener, open minded, problem solver, good decision making. • Title 1 Experience for over 9 years • Years of hiring experience • ESE certified • Construction knowledge • School Board Budget Committee

With my background in business, teaching and leadership in education make me excellent choice to tackle these important issues.

Why are you running for the Manatee County School Board?

I know that I will bring my 17 years of administration experience to the board as to what schools need from the parents, teachers and support personnel’s perspective. In addition, I will add my calmness, collaborative and cohesive work style to the School Board.

How do you propose our school system meet the challenge of providing an excellent education for our students?

Since we now hold teachers responsible for their teaching abilities more than ever before, we need to allow teachers to teach with their specific style of teaching with the resources and materials that they feel most comfortable using.

Do you see other areas where our school system should make improvements? How do you propose making those improvements?

Reading proficiency. Reading is the key to all subject areas. It must be made a greater priority. Just over 50% of our students are reading proficiently. This is not acceptable. • Training and ensuring that the teachers are teaching the love of reading. • Certain board members More time spent on reading during the school day. • Allowing teachers to teach with their specific style of teaching with the resources and materials that they feel most comfortable using. • Allowing administrators to create half grades to give students the ability to go back and catch up with reading strategies. • Allowing school administrators to hold back certain students in Kindergarten, 1st and 2nd grades that are lacking the proper reading ability before they get to 3rd grade • Certain board members need to be more respectful of parent comments and listen to them respectfully. • Certain board members need to be better prepared before a board meeting.
Christine E. Dawson

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What qualities, experience and skills do you bring to this position?

bring a breadth and width of meaningful experience from a 35 yr. career in Manatee Co Schools. Positions held include Teacher, ESE and Instructional Specialist, Asst Principal, Principal, Reading Coach. Post retirement served on Governing Board of Lincoln Memorial Academy during conversion year and first year of operation. I have lived in District 3 for 40 years, raised my children who attended and graduated from schools in District 3 and, as a blessed grandmother, will soon have another entering school in Manatee Co. My skill as a parent, educator, administrator has honed my skill in systemic planning and development, budget, curriculum and instruction, human resources, staff/community collaboration, executing orders, governance.

Why are you running for the Manatee County School Board?

Quite frankly, to boot up change. And, I choose to run when entire county electorate will select a school board member, not just the district. I feel strongly a 5 member district system needs two at-large members to create an informed and inclusive vote. I will propose that change as a board member. As my platform indicates, the "one size fits all" attitude driving board decisions is inappropriate when directed towards educating ALL students. Collaborative work by the board influencing state statute regarding FSA testing is of priority. All testing and assessment is in regard to driving instruction, not real estate. Self worth of teachers and students is 3rd priority on my platform for change. Especially salary schedule for teachers.

How do you propose our school system meet the challenge of providing an excellent education for our students?

Change either-or mentality to both-and regarding instructional materials and methods used in classrooms. For example, one reading series will not meet needs of all students. Restore teacher authority in classrooms regarding decisions on appropriate learning styles and strategies. Match learning style of student with teaching style to increase efficacy of learning. The top-down flow from the school board regarding the very political nature of one size fits all lends itself a constant cycle of remediation rather than a constant cycle of acceleration. It is also a waste of precious resources, including money and worth of teachers and students. High stakes FSA testing promotes cultural urgency to "be the best". I think we are to "be the most".

Do you see other areas where our school system should make improvements? How do you propose making those improvements?

Communication and collaboration between the "judicial branch", parents/guardians and citizenry, of the system is demanded to create proper checks and balances between policy making and implementation. I find that implementation of policy in this district often times flaws a good policy. Parents and citizenry who keep a close eye on functions are there to remind us. I hear complaints that they are not being "listened to" or "responded to" and litigation and due process complaints from families are on the rise regarding education of their children. Even though a school board seat is a non-partisan appointment, this attitude is not present in our current board majority. Also, MUCH NEEDED IMPROVEMENT is needed in distance learning model used during COVID-19 closure of schools during 4th quarter. It demonstrates a lack of vision and preparation. A publicized rush to purchase $325k worth of masks is not integral to proper long distance learning model preparation.
Mary K. Foreman

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What qualities, experience and skills do you bring to this position?
In 2012, district was shocked to find it had a $3.4 million deficit, instead of the required reserve fund. In 2017, the district did not balance its bank accounts for 9 months. It happened again in 2019, this time for 18 months. No one on the Board knew how to look at the information they were being provided with a trained eye and ask the right questions. I have been a CPA for more than 40 years and served as a member and recent chairperson of the School Board’s Audit Committee. My 7 years on that committee gave me in-depth knowledge of the district’s complex finances and its operations. I am able to analyze the data and demand accountability. There are currently two educators on the Board. As a CPA, I can lead them in effective decisions.

Why are you running for the Manatee County School Board?
For years I have been frustrated at the decisions and lack of demeanor of the Board. Tax dollars should be spent to benefit the students. If the classrooms lack resources, students won’t succeed. And if students don’t succeed, the community suffers. Administrative personnel grew by 72% while, at the same time, instructional personnel grew by only 24%. The ER.P computer software cost three times the original budget because of mismanagement. The Board is receiving “apples to oranges” financial information and doesn't see it. I can make a difference by bringing insight and responsibility to the board’s financial decisions leading to a school board with better deliberation and less fighting.

How do you propose our school system meet the challenge of providing an excellent education for our students?
Presently only 49% of our third-grade students can read at grade level. We must start remediation at an earlier grade level so the student isn’t continually catching-up and experiencing a sense of failure. Education should not be a “one size fits all.” Curriculum decisions should be made at the school instead of the district. The Covid-19 presents additional challenges in providing education in a safe manner. Students differ in learning needs and abilities. The district must offer a variety in options for families to select what is best for their children.

Do you see other areas where our school system should make improvements? How do you propose making those improvements?
Our school district is failing in the fundamentals. One of the fundamental tools of a school board is its five-year strategic plan. This plan states the district’s mission, its goals and establishes performance indicators to be able to measure the success of the administration. This document is a guide to stating priorities for finance, operations, and academics. The existing strategic plan covers the period 2015 to 2019 and was never used. The performance indicators were never established. I will hold the superintendent responsible for developing a new strategic plan and set the performance indicators. The results will be monitored and reported regularly to the Board. This will become part of the superintendent’s annual evaluation. Another improvement must be in communication. The Board has placed obstacles for public comments and frequently does not reply to constituents’ phone calls and emails. The Board works for the public and needs to perform accordingly.
Dave Watchdog Miner

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What qualities, experience and skills do you bring to this position?

I believe that among the candidates I bring to the position of serving on the Manatee School Board for the next four (4) years unequaled experience and credibility in school board governance. I am an attorney who has managed his own law practice for over 30 years. My eight (8) years on the School Board, included service as Board Chairman, Chairman of the Central Florida Public School Boards Coalition and as a Director of the Florida School Board Association. I have also served as director of the Manatee County Bar Association and as an officer of multiple community and religious organizations. These experiences and my demonstrated credibility are reasons why I am endorsed by the Manatee Teachers Assn.

Why are you running for the Manatee County School Board?

When my daughter Sarah entered King Middle School, I learned that for several years the school building had been a cause of sickness to teachers, staff, and students because of mold present in the building. I felt officials not promptly addressing this problem was inexcusable. I felt that providing a safe place for teaching and learning should be the highest priority of the school district. From then on, I have made it a core part of my life to work to make our schools better and safer for our children to learn. In the process, I became known as the “Watchdog”, a name given to me by reporters.

How do you propose our school system meet the challenge of providing an excellent education for our students?

Developing and retaining knowledgeable, enthusiastic, and dedicated teachers and other staff and providing safe and efficient and up-to-date learning facilities, are core to continuing the improvement of the education of our students. Our community’s continuing to fund public education - similar to how Sarasota County for years has funded their public education - will help continue this progress.

Do you see other areas where our school system should make improvements? How do you propose making those improvements?

We need to make larger strides toward becoming a zero energy efficient school district, one where the district generates or exceeds the amount of energy necessary to operate the school district. Strides towards these improvements can be made by including three (3) energy efficiency requirements in future construction requirements for all new schools and other similar new district buildings, which the Manatee School Board on March 20, 2020 approved (on my motion) for building a new “Sugg Middle School” Concerning these energy improvement requirements drafted by me, I have been contacted by persons from around the state for their purpose of having similar requirements included in their construction contracts.
Richard (Rick) Murphy

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What qualities, experience and skills do you bring to this position?
I consider myself a servant leader and have a deep desire to help others. I believe in seeking all stakeholders input and suggestions in a collaborative and consensus decision making process. I am extremely passionate about student achievement. I am a visionary leader who works with all stakeholders in setting a clear vision. I have worked in business, construction and transportation. I served as a Florida School Board Member in Hendry county for 14 years (1994-2008). I taught middle school 6-8 from 2005-2008 in Highlands county. I served as Florida Superintendent in Hendry County from 2008-2012. In 2013 I was a high school assistant principal in Palm Beach County. I taught in Manatee county at king Middle, Harley Middle, and elementary's

Why are you running for the Manatee County School Board?
I am running because I have always been a servant leader and believe my experience will provide organizational leadership skills to the district while supporting student achievement, the administration, teachers, schools and all employees in their work as a team. I believe my experience, knowledge and interpersonal skills will help unify the board in their leadership roles and responsibilities as elected public servants to work together for the common good of all people and support all employees, students, parents and community stakeholders. I have worked in business management, as a substitute teacher, paraprofessional, classroom teacher, school and district administrator, school board member and superintendent.

How do you propose our school system meet the challenge of providing an excellent education for our students?
The school district has great teachers and administrators. The school district should continue to recruit quality teachers and administrators. The district also should provide continuous professional development or some may call on going training opportunities for teachers and administrators. The school board should provide the financial resources to support all schools and the needs of the teachers in educating our all students. The district will need to provide new technology for its teachers and the students to support student learning. The outbreak of COVID19 has changed traditional education and the district will have to provide schools and teachers with additional resources to teach students using different methods of instruction.

Do you see other areas where our school system should make improvements? How do you propose making those improvements?
I believe that change and improvement starts with the leadership of the school district. The school board should work together as a cohesive unit collaborating and building a consensus in their decision making process. The school boards role is to provide the resources and financial support to all schools that will support student achievement. The school board also develops policy and is a important part of the school district leadership. The board hires and evaluates the performance of the superintendent who directs staff. The district needs to continue monitoring student achievement and supporting its teachers. The support staff which includes paraprofessionals, clerical staff, bus drivers, transportation, facilities, custodians, food service workers and others are very important in supporting schools, teachers and students. I have worked as a paraprofessional, substitute teacher, classroom teacher, school and district administrator and superintendent. I will support their needs.