

Board of Education Candidate Survey 2021 Birmingham Municipal Election

Greater Birmingham Ministries invites you to complete this candidate survey. Your responses will inform our non-partisan 2021 Birmingham Municipal Election Guide, which will reach over 20,000 Birmingham residents. Please return your completed candidate survey to electionguide@gbm.org by July 2.

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- 1 **Please provide a 2-3 sentence biography**
 - **I'm 32 years-old. I attended Booker T. Washington K-8 and graduated from A.H Parker High School (c/o 2007). I also hold a Bachelors of Science degree in Psychology from the University of West Alabama.**

2. **Please name any endorsements you have received**
 - **None**

3. **What do you see as the board's roles and responsibilities?**
 - **First and foremost, I have this belief that an individual can set a new standard for how a specific job title or role is done through their work**

ethic and overall actions. Watching former school board member Virginia Volker as a elementary student taught me that. For instance. She partnered with UAB to create a after school program and it was one of the best experiences of my young life. I inspire to approach this role in a way kind of similar to what Mrs. Volker did.

As it relates to the board in a general sense. It's group of individuals, who may or may not have previously known each other, that collectively share a passion for education and have spent years helping youth in one way or another. They all come together and do what's best for every aspect of Birmingham City Schools. By every aspect, I mean the principals, faculty, staff, student body and parents. A board should also be transparent, attentive to needs, innovative, fair and honest.

4. What are the biggest issues for students and families in your district and how would you address those issues in your role as a Board Member?

For me, it begins with improving the support of younger Birmingham City alumni and getting our communities active again. I've spent the past nine years as a grassroots community leader. I lead a mentoring program (IAmGreatness). I've also spent a lot of time volunteering inside the schools and helping fellow education related organizations/programs. Do you know what I often see? I see classrooms led by mostly women. I see volunteers who are mostly women. I see more from the Caucasian race showing up to help our students than African Americans. Point is. A large chunk of our student body is exposed to an unbalanced structure all across the board.

Speaking of being unbalanced. Access to more scholarships is another issue. Ramsay High has made things look easy. Then you have success stories at our other six high schools. So people haven't been able to notice how top heavy things are. For instance. A few years ago, I took on the challenge of trying to help one of my mentees with her college financial aid. She had done the right things. Among them was being top 10 of her class. That lack of support to help achieve our goal, quite honestly, broke my heart.

Before the pandemic, I was already seeing issues like hunger, financial struggles and educational inequalities. I've visited schools and listened to students speak about their desires for better resources to explore their passions. Now? I think the pandemic and virtual learning shined a big, important light on those same struggles that already existed. Some of those struggles were elevated. We had students who either stopped logging on to virtual learning or never logged on altogether. I recently saw a fifth grade promotion ceremony with 15 to 20 students.

· The list is way longer. I've already started to put the wheels in motion to address those issues. If elected, I'll be prepared to take action. If I'm not elected, I'll be prepared to take action. But I'll also add this. It takes unity to achieve all things in life. School board is a team. Addressing any issue takes a team effort.

5. What role, if any, does the Birmingham Board of Education and Birmingham City Schools play in community and public safety?

· Recently, I attended a peace rally hosted by Students Demand Action (Birmingham chapter). It was led by these two young women who attended Huffman High School. Safety was one topic of focus. There were two specific things that stood out to me. 1.) After the Courtlin Arrington shooting at their school, Huffman resumed classes the following day. 2.) The lack of safety measures put in place for students, principals, teachers, faculty and visitors.

· I attended Birmingham City Schools between 1995-2007. During that period, there a strong connection between community and our schools. Positive alternatives existed to counter those negatives. The police, for instance, used to be viewed as heroes. I remember attending Boy Scout summer camps and having officers basically serving as our camp counselors. My dad successfully recruited many children from the housing projects. We also had the D.A.R.E program, Police Athletic Teams, PING, etc. Then school itself provided us with sports, band, choir and all these various extra curricular activities to keep us occupied. In a nutshell. The safety narrative wasn't focused on as much.

· My high school years were the transition period to where our students currently are. From 2007 to the present, a gradual domino effect occurred. The access to technology changed. Exposure changed the mindset. YouTube became popular. Social media platforms grew. Cell phones not only tremendously upgraded but now even elementary age students have one. Gaining a laptop or tablet became a trend. As this transition was happening, the Birmingham Board of Education didn't have consistent leadership. There was so much controversy from one superintendent to the next. From a violence to mental health standpoint, it left a void to notice and address growing needs of our schools.

6. As a Board Member, will you advocate for policies that protect queer and transgender youth? If so, how?

- **Look at my history and the answer is obvious. I'm a part of the Sidewalk Film Festival family. We have SHOUT and now SHOUT About Youth. Last year, I helped create a social justice youth council. Britney Hawkins, then a senior at Ramsay High, asked "can I focus on LGBTQ rights?" My immediate answer was yes.**
- **In 2014, Patricia Todd (at the time was a member of th Alabama House of Representatives) introduced the HB139 bill and was seeking to get it passed. I knew some teens from the Alabama Alliance for Healthy Youth. Their organization, alongside AIDS Alabama, planned a trip to Montgomery to advocate for HB139. I attended.**
- **In 2016, I was a counselor for the YWCA hosted Anytown Alabama. One teen in my cabin was transgender and several other camp attendees were a part of the LGBTQ community. Point is. I'll lose votes for this answer. But If I showed support as a community leader, I'll do the same as a board member. No matter what the situation is. I'm going to be fair and unbasis to all youth. I'm going to listen. I'm going to be an ally when it's logical and most needed.**

7. What is your position on charter schools?

- **I always answer this question the same way. My primary focus is on Birmingham City Schools and ways to do what's needed/helpful for everyone affiliated with our family. Do I have an issue with charter schools? No. Unhappy parents deserve to have an alternate option. Those who stepped up to create charters have their reasons for doing so. Will I ever vote "yes" to approve another? No. My goal as a potential board member is to help bring that pride and joy people once had about the school system I'm a product of. Let's take responsibility for our role in losing students. Let's figure out a plan to fix things.**
- **Of course, someone might look at my resume and see Holy Family Cristo Rey listed. I'm not 100% sure what they are classified as. But obviously, it isn't within our school system. My bond with Holy Family happened because someone from their administration saw me in the community and said their student body had a need. I took action and did my part for those students. Plain and simple.**

8. **There is a national conversation on teaching Critical Race Theory in public schools to make public education more equitable. Do you believe the BCS curriculum should be changed to be more equitable? If so, how?**
- **Rewinding back to 2019. I actually reached out to Mayor Randall Woodfin's team and the Division of Youth Services about funding related to a Black History educational project. Those talks didn't go far. But the pandemic allowed me time to research and create my own Black History curriculum. Upon also creating a social justice youth council (initially alongside the YWCA), I had students who were heavily focused on racism and police brutality (especially the George Floyd tragedy). So I tried to utilize a bit of my curriculum within those conversations. However, it was difficult to get my group fully engaged in those talks about the past.**
 - **Overall though, I do think it's important to address the past. Yet there is a way to do it without being controversial. Plus there now exists a large population of Hispanic students who attend Birmingham City Schools. They should have representation in the history debate as well. I believe in being inclusive to everyone. So personal goal is to create something outside of the school board realm. I want it to be designed like a community culture club where students have the option of participating. I'm also planning to go further with the curriculum I created**