

School Board REC Questionnaire

| ANSWERS FROM CANDIDATES RUNNING FOR PUTNAM COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD IN 2022 PRIMARY ELECTION TO QUESTIONS POSED BY THE REC ELECTIONS COMMITTEE | |
|--|---|
| What motivates you to want to become a school board member? | |
| Holly Pickens, candidate D1 | My motivation comes from my commitment to education in Putnam County. I decided to drop out of the DROP (Florida Retirement) program to run for school board in 2018 so in reality I gave up a large portion of my retirement to run for school board (a decision that I have not regretted). I did this because I felt that our teachers and students deserved better representation in decisions that directly affected them. My desire is that all our students and our employees are successful and reach their full potential. This desire guides me in all my school board decisions. |
| Bud McInnis, candidate D4 | <p>The children of Putnam County motivate me to re-run as the District Four School Board representative.</p> <p>As the father of two sons who graduated from our schools and a Product of Putnam (Palatka South High School), this county is my home. Because of OUR schools, my sons received a quality education that allowed them to succeed in life. Because of our schools, I was set up to succeed in my career in the United States Postal Service. Our schools are the reason I finished my B.A. in Education after retiring from the post office. My love for this county, and my drive to ensure every child in our schools succeeds led me to run for school board in 2018.</p> <p>Four years later, my calling is just as strong as it was when I began this journey. I will continue to advocate for the children of our county, represent the citizens of Putnam County and work tirelessly to ensure every student in our schools receives a quality education, can explore their interests and succeed long after they graduate from our schools.</p> |
| Linda Wagner, candidate D4 | I initially became interested in running for the School Board after our local Melrose Elementary School was almost torn down. MES is a huge part of the Melrose community, and its loss would have devastated our small town. Since that time, I have also noticed the many issues that arose during Covid regarding the content in our schools' curriculum and the lack of many parents to have their voices heard with regard to educational decision-making. These issues concerned me both as a parent and American Citizen, and helped prompt me to run for School Board in an effort to fix the problems and to give back to my community for all it has done for me. |
| Phil Leary, candidate D5 | <p>First and foremost, to work to assure that all children in the Putnam County School District receive the absolute best education possible. I want the students attending our schools to have the same educational opportunities my children and I received.</p> <p>And, having five Granddaughter's that are or will be attending Putnam County Schools, I have the time, sincere desire, motivation, and experience to serve. At this point in my life, I want to serve the community, and the School Board is a great place to serve.</p> |
| Kevin Whitlow, candidate D5 | I have grown up in an educational family. My dad was a History teacher and School Administrator, my mom was a Home Economics teacher and head of Guidance at the High School level. During college I took a position with a Graduation supply company and have worked with schools for the last 38 years. My love for public education, it's students and staff are what motivates me. I want to bring my experience to help the Putnam County School Board. |
| What are your experiences that qualify you for the position? | |
| Holly Pickens, candidate D1 | I was a teacher and a coach at CCJSHS for 34 years and I loved my job. I also served as department chair and a beginning teacher mentor for many years. I believe that my background in education has been extremely valuable during my first term on the school board. I am proud of the fact that both of my children were educated in Putnam District Schools. I can see the district from the eyes of a teacher, parent and now a school board member. I have a working knowledge of many of the programs that are offered in our district which I feel is a big benefit. I also serve on the St. Johns River State Athletic Board. I am active in my church youth programs as well as community organizations. I currently volunteer in Take Stock in Children (a youth mentoring program) and Putnam County Parks and Recreation Youth Volleyball. |

School Board REC Questionnaire

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Bud McInnis, candidate D4</p> | <p>Having served as our District Four School Board Member the past four years, I have experience in negotiations, conflict management, lobbying for our schools, advocating for my constituents and navigating the subtleties of bureaucracy that comes with serving as an elected official.</p> <p>Prior to my time as a School Board Member, I worked for the United States Postal Service in various capacities. I climbed my way through the ranks to become a supervisor at the Main Street Post Office in Gainesville. During this time, I managed teams, advocated for my employees, negotiated with the government, represented my fellow postal workers as a union representative and developed a passion for services.</p> <p>Upon retiring from the Postal Service, I began to substitute teach for Putnam County Schools while pursuing a B.A. of Education at St. Leo University. After obtaining my degree, I taught briefly at C.H. Price Middle School before becoming a graduation coach and mentor to students. In this capacity I personally witnessed the challenges and roadblocks that our students face. This experience is what continues to drive my passion for our schools.</p> |
| <p>Linda Wagner, candidate D4</p> | <p>Having been raised in a family of educators, I was always taught that an education is something that no one can take away from you. I raised my sons in Putnam County, and afterward returned to school myself, attending Santa Fe Community College, the University of Florida, and ultimately Florida Coastal School of Law. Throughout this time, I was also working full-time as a legal assistant, law office manager and bookkeeper, and was a single mother of a child attending UFN in Jacksonville. I have been that parent trying to balance their own life while being actively involved with their children's education. I have been that parent wishing I had a voice in what happens in our school system, yet feeling powerless. Now as a family law attorney, I represent numerous parents and teachers, and have witnessed firsthand the new issues that they are facing. I am both willing and able to educate myself on any matters that come before the School Board in order to address them in the most responsible way.</p> |
| <p>Phil Leary, candidate D5</p> | <p>I have over 35 years' experience working in local, state, and federal government, in addition to running a successful consulting firm for over 18 years. I grew up in a family of educators, my Grandfather served on the PCSD Board in the late 1940's and early in the 1950's, my Mother taught School in Putnam County for over 25 years and my older Sister was a Teacher, Principal, and former Superintendent of PCSD. I formerly served six years as President of the Kelley Smith Elementary Parent Teacher Association and have consulted for the School District on Growth Management and Comprehensive Planning requirements.</p> |
| <p>Kevin Whitlow, candidate D5</p> | <p>I have worked with schools in Northeast Florida for 38 years. I have been responsible for preparing students for Graduation with products and programs. Working with administrators to improve test scores, student attendance and retention. I have also worked closely with Student Government at the school, district and state levels. Through sponsorships, classroom curriculum and leading workshops are some of the ways we have meet student needs.</p> |
| <p>What attributes are essential for successful school board member?</p> | |
| <p>Holly Pickens, candidate D1</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Has integrity and is respected by the community 2. Is dedicated and committed to the community 3. Understands the vision and mission of the school district 4. Is competent, organized, and prepared 5. Focus on students – uses student data and facts in decision making 6. Is respectful and collaborative 7. Is knowledgeable about the school district |
| <p>Bud McInnis, candidate D4</p> | <p>The key attribute that is essential for a successful school board member is to remember the reason for our elected position: to serve our children. If a board member neglects to keep their focus on the children of Putnam County, they neglect to serve their very office. In 2014, I observed that our school district was slowly turning their focus away from the children of Putnam County, which then compelled me to run for this office.</p> <p>While constantly keeping our focus on the children, there are a number of essential skills for a school board member to succeed. A board member must remain informed so they can be prepared to make the proper decisions to promote the educational advancement of our students. Remaining informed requires necessary inquiries for information regarding approval or disapproval of the board agenda, policies and practices as outlined by the Florida Statutes.</p> <p>As successful school board member identifies themselves as an ambassador to the community they serve. Ensuring that one remains an open-line of communication for all matters of concern from our constituents and brings those concerns to the school board is a necessity.</p> <p>A school board member should be physically there to support our children at educational, musical and athletic events to serve as a reminder to our students that their community supports them.</p> |
| <p>Linda Wagner, candidate D4</p> | <p>I believe the most essential attributes for a successful school board member are a willingness to listen objectively, the ability to think critically, and the foresight to make sound, fiscally responsible decisions.</p> |

School Board REC Questionnaire

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Phil Leary, candidate D5 | To be a good listener is a priority. To work collaboratively with fellow Board members, the Superintendent, and his administration, Teachers, Principals, Guidance Counselors, and most importantly Parents of the students in establishing Policy and Rules that assure student success. To be a good communicator, discussing School Board actions with parents, and community groups. Being active in visiting schools, PTA meetings, and school events. |
| Kevin Whitlow, candidate D5 | I think a board member must be a strong leader, have knowledge of how schools' function, be willing to listen and work with others. He or she must also look at this position as a full-time responsibility and not a stepping stone for another job. |
| | What do you see as the board's roles and responsibilities? |
| Holly Pickens, candidate D1 | Following State Statutes as they pertain to school boards is a school boards responsibility. A main responsibility of the school board is to establish school district policy that are used to govern the schools. The policies should be reviewed and amended regularly. The school board is also responsible for guiding the district budget, approving bills and spending priorities. The school board is also responsible for the implementation of the districts Strategic Plan. This is done by monitoring student data and achievement. I believe that developing relationships within the community and being an advocate for the students in our school district are of utmost importance. I also believe that school board members should be very visible and accessible to the community. The needs of our students should always be considered in the decision-making process by School Board members. |
| Bud McInnis, candidate D4 | From observation and experience, the main role of the school board is to make policy. The board outlines policies that govern the employment, recruitment, supervision and benefits of the district's employees. Board members have the responsibility to remain informed and advocate for all of those they serve. Board members are the voice of their constituents and serve the role of representative for their interests and concerns. The school board's primary responsibility to act as a trusted steward of the interests of our constituents, our students and the teachers and staff members of our district. The board establishes policies that govern the employment, recruitment, supervision, evaluation and dismissal of employees. Board members must also set goals, establish budgets, evaluate progress toward those goals, ask voters to approve bond measures and local option levies for facilities and operations, and guide collective bargaining. School Board's also choose transportation systems. |
| Linda Wagner, candidate D4 | The primary goal of a School Board should be to implement policies at the local level that are consistent with the laws of the State of Florida. There are numerous other responsibilities, however, including fiscal decision-making relating to budgets and levying taxes, and certain quasi-judicial decisions such as student expulsions, employee discipline, and approval/termination of charter school contracts. Throughout all of these processes, it is imperative that the School Board allow for input from the community and from individuals who will be affected by their decisions. |
| Phil Leary, candidate D5 | The primary responsibilities are to set policy and adopt a budget. Additional responsibilities are to assure that State Statutes and Administrative Rules are followed and complied with. School board members also serve as representatives and advocates for the community and prioritize the needs and interests of students and the public school system. School Board members should work to cultivate a culture of support and success within the community. |
| Kevin Whitlow, candidate D5 | The role of a board member is to represent and work with the community to improve student achievement. This is done by setting policy based on State standards and working with the School Superintendent to help manage district affairs, personnel and properties. |
| | What role does policy play in the functioning of the board? |
| Holly Pickens, candidate D1 | We follow State Statute in our meetings and workshops. Policy allows the board to effectively and efficiently carry out their roles and responsibilities. |

School Board REC Questionnaire

| | |
|--|---|
| Bud McInnis, candidate D4 | <p>One of the School Boards major functions is to create policies for our district. In doing so, there are strict policies that they must follow.</p> <p>Everything the School Board does is under the guide of policy, ensuring that the board is in-line and adherent through Florida Statutes. To help the board navigate the intricacies of creating policies for the school district and making the most of Florida Statutes to benefit Putnam County, the board has embraced technology. Through partnerships with the Florida School Board Association and the use of NEOLA, the School District has the resources, guidance and support to create policies to protect the interest of Putnam students and schools.</p> <p>Board members must also follow policy, adhering to Florida State Statutes, Roberts Rule of Order, ensuring transparency, remaining timely and ensuring that they adhere to Federal and State policies that are considerate of the citizens.</p> |
| Linda Wagner, candidate D4 | <p>It is unclear to which type of policy this question refers. The School Board's purpose is to create policy and rules that govern our school district. Because their decisions must be consistent with those approved by the Florida Legislature, the School Board policies may be limited somewhat in their scope, or limited in application.</p> |
| Phil Leary, candidate D5 | <p>Establishing and following adopted policies are a key in the governance of the public school system and of the utmost importance</p> |
| Kevin Whitlow, candidate D5 | <p>Setting policy is one of the main functions of a school board. It is important that they be aware of various federal, state and local policy that can impact the work of the school system.</p> |
| Do you have sufficient time/energy to devote to this position? | |
| Holly Pickens, candidate D1 | <p>Yes! I currently serve on the Putnam County School Board and have been the Board Chair for the past two years. Being a School Board member is an honor and a privilege that I take very seriously.</p> |
| Bud McInnis, candidate D4 | <p>I have plenty of time and energy to devote to the school board. As a retiree, this position is my primary focus. I take great joy in representing our citizens, staying informed about local, state and federal education policies and playing a role in helping direct the future of our District.</p> <p>I am a mentor and attend school events on a weekly basis in addition to upholding my responsibilities as a board member. From musicals, to concerts, football, basketball, academic events, graduations and more, I find the energy and make the time to ensure I am living up to the trust the citizens place in me.</p> |
| Linda Wagner, candidate D4 | <p>I am a partner with the law firm of Owens & Wagner, P.A. in Melrose, Florida. As such, I create and control my schedule, which is sufficiently flexible to allow for my attendance at School Board meetings, school functions, and other interactions with the public and school system employees, as is necessary for any School Board Member.</p> |
| Phil Leary, candidate D5 | <p>My plan is to be a full-time School Board Member and prioritize my time working to enhance the school system. I am in great health and have ample energy and time to devote to the responsibilities and duties of the School Board.</p> |
| Kevin Whitlow, candidate D5 | <p>I have sold my business to my son 3 years ago and I work a few days a week with him and a representative in the Gainesville and Ocala area.</p> |
| Do you believe in big government or limited government as it relates to Putnam County Schools? Explain. | |
| Holly Pickens, candidate D1 | <p>I believe if we put our students, their families, and our schools at the forefront of all our thinking then we will be successful. I believe that our district provides the best tools for our students and teachers to experience success. Principals know the needs of their schools and teachers know the needs of their students.</p> |
| Bud McInnis, candidate D4 | <p>When it comes to Putnam County Schools, I am a supporter of limited government. I believe with big government in our schools, the focus turns away from the children and the goal of advancing our students. With big government in our district, I believe there is less oversight for officials and an emphasis on spending rather than optimizing our current strengths. As a school board member, I ran with fiscal responsibility and community partnership as two of my core principals. Through partnerships with community organizations and promotion, Putnam County Schools must remain a faithful steward of taxpayer dollars. The board and members must also vote, and act, impartially for the good of the school system and the citizens of Putnam County.</p> |

School Board REC Questionnaire

| | |
|---|---|
| Linda Wagner, candidate D4 | I strongly support a limited government in all areas, including Putnam County, and believe that particularly when it comes to school systems, less is more. Parents should not delegate the responsibilities of raising children to the county or state in which they live. Schools should focus more on educating our children as opposed to raising them, and both teachers and parents should be held to a higher level of responsibility in those areas. School Boards certainly have purpose and play a vital role in addressing issues that arise within our schools, but should be careful to not overstep their boundaries and lose sight of the ultimate goal of providing a quality education for our children. |
| Phil Leary, candidate D5 | As a conservative republican for more than 25 years, I am not a fan of big government and strongly believe that government closest to the people serves the people best. However, there are times where the State needs to adopt laws that assure the priority of the public school system is focused on core subjects, Reading Comprehension, Math, and Science. Not CRT or Woke teachings. As an example, I fully supported the legislation signed by Governor DeSantis that will prevent the wrong kind of teaching. |
| Kevin Whitlow, candidate D5 | I am for limited government at the national, state and local governments. If I could do away with the Department of Education I would. Money and decisions are best made and spent at the local level. |
| How do you manage bureaucracy to ensure there is no abuse of power? | |
| Holly Pickens, candidate D1 | Understanding the mission and vision statements in place in our school district. Understanding our goals and using data to drive the process. |
| Bud McInnis, candidate D4 | First of all, I took an oath to this office and I honor it. Following policy and transparency is the key to ensuring there is no abuse of power. That means that I, and my fellow Board Members, file reports properly and timely, adhere to the standards of the Florida Sunshine laws to ensure complete integrity. I also ensure that I uphold policy and procedures to report any abuses of power. Each board member has the responsibility to report any signs of corruption from other members or school district employees to ensure that we live up to the standards of the People of Putnam. Lastly, the votes that I cast during school board meetings, including the discussions to follow in order to reveal more insights on specific issues directed before the board for vote, ensure there is no abuse of power. |
| Linda Wagner, candidate D4 | Managing bureaucracy to ensure there is no abuse of power is often a difficult task without creating more bureaucratic oversight. One way this is accomplished is by having a system of checks and balances, and holding people responsible for their actions in their respective positions. On a local level, that system is built into School Boards by the members having different roles. For example, the role of the Superintendent differs from that of other members, because the Superintendent actually works for the Board, and manages the day-to-day operations in the District. He provides information and recommendations to the Board, while the Board makes the final determinations. The Board attorney also plays a different role, by providing legal guidance with respect to the issues being addressed by the Board. Additionally, Florida's Sunshine Laws help to keep the issues in the public realm, by limiting the School Board's discussion of relevant issues to public forums. This provides the public the ability to openly monitor what is being discussed and decided without the threat of "closed door" decisions being made outside of their presence. |
| Phil Leary, candidate D5 | As a School Board member, it is imperative that each member fully understand their role establishing both policy and budget, to assure that a "bureaucracy" is not created by administrators and that every aspect of the budget is carefully vetted assuring that taxpayers dollars are spent efficiently and effectively. |
| Kevin Whitlow, candidate D5 | Make sure you are clear and concise on what you want to get done. Know your priorities and empower others to get involved in the process. Make your decisions in a timely manner and keep and make all information used in the decision process accessible to others. |
| What is your opinion on collective bargaining among teachers, unions, school board and superintendent? | |
| Holly Pickens, candidate D1 | There are advantages and disadvantages to collective bargaining. It allows teachers and other employees to have a voice in the contracts. It can also hold up ratification of contracts which can be difficult on our employees. The goal of both sides should be what is the best for our teachers and employees but at the same time allowing the district to continue meet the needs of our students. |

School Board REC Questionnaire

| | |
|--|---|
| Bud McInnis, candidate D4 | I support collective bargaining among teachers, unions, school board and superintendent. When I was in the Postal Service, I served as a lifetime union member of the National Association of Letter Carriers Branch 1025 and as a union shop steward for 17 years. In my experience, unions can adequately support their members at a local level and sometimes fail to do so at a national level. When collective bargaining is utilized, the outcome and argument are not one-sided. When we have an opportunity to bargain and work together, the end result is more likely to benefit all parties involved. Collective bargaining is necessary among teachers, teacher unions, and the superintendent. My observation in education, strong relationships with unions, built through negotiations, can help create the conditions for student and school success. During COVID-19, I observed a division. Keeping in mind for all decisions made: is the proposal in the best interests of the children? This important question, when embedded in the collective bargaining process, forces both sides to carefully consider their shared mission. Sadly, there was no commitment from the union regarding implementation of safety measures during reopening schools. This is a failure of the union to the employees. Another example, Governor DeSantis has pledged 5 million dollars to Putnam County School District. The union requests immediate teacher salary raises without any consideration to funding categorical items not fully funded by the State of Florida. For unions to insist that their pay be increased would mean reducing investments in other items of importance to children, like technology or infrastructure. |
| Linda Wagner, candidate D4 | Because Florida is a "right-to-work" state, teachers are not required to join unions, but have the right to do so if they choose. Collective bargaining typically results when the requests of teachers and/or their unions are not addressed to their satisfaction. I believe that unions can be effective in negotiating for teachers, but those negotiations must not be allowed to devolve into strong-arm tactics. Throughout the process, the School Board must maintain its responsibility to make decisions that govern and support teachers while still maintaining their fiscal responsibility to the community at large. In addition, collective bargaining puts the Superintendent in a particularly difficult position. As the advisor to the Board, he must maintain a good relationship with the teachers he oversees, while at the same time providing input and information to the Board for their consideration. Both the Superintendent and the Board Attorney must maintain objectivity throughout the process, as the School Board strives to keep the confidence of the public. It is imperative that the Board members engage as a unified group when engaged in collective bargaining, and provide open channels of communication with the public to avoid situations escalating from misinformation. |
| Phil Leary, candidate D5 | Personally, I have never understood why Teachers as professionals with at least a bachelor's degree need to be unionized. And although at some time in history Unions served a purpose, I do not think that is the case today. The process of Collective Bargaining, can create animosity between teachers and the School Board/Administration which is unnecessary and counterproductive. |
| Kevin Whitlow, candidate D5 | I don't like the ideas of Unions. Unions tend to drive agendas from a National prospective and may not have the interests of the local community in mind. I want teaches to be paid a better salary but that is not a school board decision. A group selected by the Superintendent meet with teacher representatives to agree on pay scales. The board just approves or disapproves the contract. |
| Do you believe the school board should be involved early in the budget process for the county? Explain. | |
| Holly Pickens, candidate D1 | It is my belief that the Assistant Superintendent for Business and Finance and her team develop a budget and bring that working budget to the board in a workshop. The budget is also presented in a public hearing twice before approval. |
| Bud McInnis, candidate D4 | The School Board should be involved early in the budget process for Putnam County Schools. In Florida, the state government requires funds be returned to the State if a child leaves school. As a result, when enrollment is down in our schools, the state withholds funds necessary to help our district grow. The School Board serves as oversight and a representative for the interest of those the district serves to ensure that funds allocated benefit each child within our district. With declining student enrollment it's imperative to manage our educational dollars wisely. |
| Linda Wagner, candidate D4 | I believe the School Board should be involved as early as possible with any issue relating to Putnam County Schools, as the School Board has the best insight into the needs of the district and its students. |
| Phil Leary, candidate D5 | Absolutely!! It is imperative that a school board member be involved from day one of the budget process to assure that adopted policies and goals set by the Board are prioritized in the budget and that every dollar being spent is justified. |
| Kevin Whitlow, candidate D5 | I would like the opportunity as a board member to be more involved in the budget process. Knowing what the thought process is on the spending I feel would help me make a better decision on my vote. Not sure that is in our job description, but I know we are informed on the budget prior to voting on it. We can also pull and discuss all items prior to the vote. |
| Additional Comments: | |
| Holly Pickens, candidate D1 | These were very thought-provoking questions! Thank you for asking them. |
| Bud McInnis, candidate D4 | |
| Linda Wagner, candidate D4 | |

School Board REC Questionnaire

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Phil Leary, candidate D5 | <p>Why am I the most qualified and best choice for the School Board:</p> <p>I am a life-long resident of Putnam County and graduate of Palatka South High School, St. Johns River Community College, and the University of Florida, and have also completed Post Graduate Work in Public Administration at the University of North Florida. I have two children who are products of the Putnam County School System, my Son is an Army Nation Guard 2nd Lieutenant, and my daughter is the Chief Financial Analyst at Georgia Pacific. And I now have Granddaughters all who are or will be attending Putnam County Schools in addition to my daughter-in-law who is a Math Teacher Interlachen High School. I formerly served on the Palatka City Commission, and former County Planning & Development Department Director. I am a nationally certified Land Use Planner, with over Thirty-five years of experience in government and private sector management and administration, land use planning, public policy, budgets, environmental regulatory programs, and real estate. I care deeply about the 10,000 plus children attending our public schools and feel I have the ability, drive and determination to enhance the public school's system and the education of all students.</p> |
| Kevin Whitlow, candidate D5 | |