CCSD District 7

CANDIDATE SURVEY FOR CHARLESTON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT 7
(West Ashley area)

Candidates running for this seat include

- **Francis Marion Beylotte** Website: beylotteforschools.com
- **Joy Brown** Website: joybrownforccsd.com
- **Darryl Ray Griffin** Did not reply to survey
- **Leah Whatley** Website: whatleyforschoolboard.com

Candidates were asked to respond to questions in 100 words or less. If they exceeded 100 words, their response ended at 100 words, as indicated by (100).

1. If elected, will you vote against going into executive session except for extraordinary personnel matters? Please explain your answer if it includes the possibility of doing business in private.

Beylotte: Absolutely! As someone who's watched different boards over the years, I've often felt that executive sessions were being abused. Of course, I can't prove that because everything was happening in secret. I question the legal advice being provided in that it encourages too much secretive meetings. Transparency is a key foundation for effective governance in the public sector and constantly meeting in secret undermines transparency. Personnel issues and student issues that require confidentiality are the primary reasons to meet in secret. But the rest of the work managing public money impacting a large and important public institution should occur openly.

Brown: I am committed to utilizing executive session only when legally mandated. Covered circumstances include specific personnel or student matters, contract negotiations, and matters covered by

attorney-client privilege. It's important to distinguish between information legally protected from disclosure and information the board prefers to keep confidential. Additionally, I will push for the agenda to be transparent and include as much information as possible. Being elected to serve on the school board is a public trust. As a Trustee, I'm accountable to my community, and I believe accountability requires transparency and a willingness to conduct board business publicly whenever the law allows.

Griffin: Did not reply to survey.

Whatley: I believe the public's business should be conducted in public. I would vote to enter executive session only when a specific matter falls within an exception authorized by South Carolina law and confidentiality is legitimately necessary--such as an individual personnel or student matter, privileged legal advice, active contract, or property negotiations, security matters, or a criminal investigation. I would not support vague or convenience-based executive sessions, and any Board action should occur in open session.

2. What long-term impacts do you foresee in the rising use and popularity of generative AI tools like ChatGPT over the next four years?

Beylotte: The end of human creativity and critical thinking leading to collapse of civilization. Or we can get it under control and use it to help us complete rote tasks like developing medication administration schedules, but it should not be let loose unregulated to usurp human creativity.

Brown: We are already seeing some of the ramifications: the onslaught of misspelled AI flyers and incorrect, nonsensical "facts" are entering our everyday life and I don't believe we should accept it as a given. In recent weeks, CCSD announced its Generative AI policy. As a Trustee, I am committed to ensuring those policies are effective and working as intended. My goal is to ensure our AI policies are supporting student growth and not replacing critical thinking or problem-solving skills that we want to nurture.

Griffin: Did not reply to survey.

Whatley: Initially, I was skeptical of AI and, frankly, somewhat fearful of where it could lead--particularly as discussions of AGI became more common. But when I realized that artificial intelligence was going to be an issue school boards could not ignor, I decided I needed to understand it rather than fear it. Following the District's Cognia accreditation, I took additional training through Cognia to learn how school systems around the country were approaching AI in K-12 education. I also began using generative AI myself--not simply to help with writing, but as a tool for learning and problem solving. I have used (100)

3. If you use generative AI for matters related to the school board, will you apply student standards to your use of it?

Beylotte: I do not use it for anything on this campaign. Period. I personally despise it and find the slop utterly revolting. I do not use it to help with questions, website content or graphic design. I challenge other candidates to do the same because materials circulating and websites appear to be AI generated. I think generative AI should be banned in totality through 8th grade. And introduced slowly with significant restrictions during high school. It would not be difficult to convince me to ban it entirely, but I am open to seeing how if restricted and carefully managed could help.

Brown: Absolutely, I firmly believe in leading by example. During my campaign, I have held myself to the same guidelines and standards for AI use set for CCSD students. I will continue to follow those standards as a Trustee.

Griffin: Did not reply to survey.

Whatley: Yes, in fact, I believe I should hold myself to an even higher standard. AI can be an extrodinary tool for research, brainstorming, organizing information, and improving communication. However, it should never replace independent thought, judgement, or personal

responsibility. If I use generative AI for matters related to the School BOard, I am responsible for the final product. That means independently verifying factual claims, checking primary sources when appropriate, carefully proofreading what I publish, protecting confidential matters, and ensuring that anything bearing my name actually reflects my own thoughts and decisions. I learned a very public lesson about that responsibility (100)

4. There's a sense in the community that the board has turned over much of its oversight authority to the superintendent. If you agree, how will you recapture oversight?

Beylotte: I do not wish to micromanage the day to day work of district leadership or classroom teachers. The role of the Trustee is to ensure the budget is appropriately allocated to serve the students, hold the Superintendent accountable and advocate for broad policy initiatives like expanding behavioral health supports. If there are problems with contracting and business decisions, for example, that will be addressed in the evaluation of the Superintendent.

Brown: The school board's core responsibilities are to establish the district's direction through clear goals and policies, hire and evaluate the superintendent, and provide fiscal oversight through the budget. My duties as a Trustee are to listen to the community, ask difficult and necessary questions, and provide meaningful oversight while making decisions in the best interest of students, families, and the community I am elected to serve. Strong governance requires shared leadership, transparency, and accountability. I will work to ensure the board fulfills its responsibilities by setting clear expectations, monitoring progress, acknowledging what isn't working, and holding leadership accountable.

Griffin: Did not reply to survey.

Whatley: I do not agree with the premise that the Board has "turned over" its oversight authority to the Superintendent. I believe there is an important distinction between governance and management. The Superintendent is, by law, the chief executive officer of the

Charleston County School District. The Board's responsibility is to hire the Superintendent, establish the mission and educational goals of the District, set policy, adopt and oversee the budget, evaluate the Superintendent's performance, provide long-range oversight, and hold the administration accountable for results. The Superintendent and her professional staff are responsible for administering the District and implementing those policies. Oversight (100)

5. Do you believe the school board has been overly politicized? If so, how will you rein it back into focus on local education issues?

Beylotte: Yes. I've seen this all my life going back to John Graham Altman, but the current board over the past 4 years has taken it to the extreme level. Somehow, they just slowed the culture clashes and just fell in hole greeted by Anita Huggins. She's been a fantastic Superintendent, but I would not give this Board an ounce credit for planning and thinking that through. We can't rely on luck moving forward. First, don't elect anyone backed by dark money groups. They are never focused on children. Second, elect members who express student centered solutions vs adult factions aligned (100)

Brown: We have witnessed too many school board meetings devolve into chaos, personal conflicts, and political agendas, taking focus away from the students, teachers, and families we are elected to serve. I will work to put students first by supporting our teachers, engaging with all constituents regardless of their viewpoints, and making logical, data-driven decisions based on what is best for our students. We can disagree respectfully while still working together toward the same goal: providing our students with the best education possible. Let's get politics out of public education and put the focus back on the students.

Griffin: Did not reply to survey.

Whatley: I think the word "politicized" can mean different things to different people. School boards will inevitably have disagreements because trustees are elected by communities with different perspectives and priorities. I do not believe disagreement is itself

dysfunction, nor do I believe every controversial education issue should be dismissed as "politics". Where I do beilieve a board can lose its way is when personalities, partisan identity, national political battles, or ideological labels become more important than the work happening in our schools. My standard is much simpler: is what we are doing advancing student achievement, supporting safe and effective schools, recruiting (100)

6. What are some issues that you personally want to address and repair during your time on the board?

Beylotte: Behavioral health supports. Anxiety, depression and addiction are at crisis levels. I am particularly concerned about vaping and addiction. Younger generations are becoming more addicted each year--at younger ages. We must act with a true sense of urgency. I will be that voice at every single meeting for the next 4 years. We can solve these problems, but we need to act!

Brown: It's not glamorous but I have an affinity for policy. I'll work to establish a comprehensive policy committee, similar to the Audit and Finance Committee. The Policy Committee would include a representative cross-section of the community working alongside district staff to proactively review policies, gather input, and recommend improvements to the full board.

I'm deeply committed to restoring public trust. We achieve this through true oversight, transparency, and responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars. A strong Policy Committee would be an effective step toward creating a more transparent, accountable, and collaborative process for developing the policies that guide our school district.

Griffin: Did not reply to survey.

Whatley: My priorities are continuing to improve student achievment while closing persistent opportunity gaps, strengthening school safety, supporting and retaining excellent teachers, maintaining strong fiscal oversight, and rebuilding public trust in

the Board. I also want us to continue improving Board governance so that disagreements do not distract from the work. CCSD's new strategic goals give us measurable targets in literacy, mathematics, science, college and career readiness, school climate, fiscal stewardship, and educator quality. Ultimately I want every decision that we make to answer one question; does this help us provide a better education for Charleston County's children?

7. What is your plan to ensure the school district is able to continue serving a growing student population as Charleston County attracts more and more residents?

Beylotte: This is a huge problem in West Ashley where we do not even have complete middle school campus. We need to ensure community voices are at the table when capital projects are planned and that district officials are held accountable when promised capital projects are suddenly shifted or abandoned altogether.

Brown: Communities across District 7, particularly West Ashley, are experiencing rapid growth. We need a proactive approach to make sure our schools can meet this expansion. The new elementary school planned for Long Savanna is an important step, but we have to consider the impact continued development will have on our middle and high schools. That means planning ahead, making thoughtful decisions about capacity and resources, and setting our schools up for success. I'll use enrollment projections along with district, city, and county data to inform our decisions and help us make responsible investments and prepare our schools for the future.

Griffin: Did not reply to survey.

Whatley: Growth is not occuring evenly across Charleston County, so we need to plan with data rather than react after schools become overcrowded. That means using enrollment projectinos, school-capacity data and development trends to anticipate where seats will be needed; expanding or building facilities where growth warrants it; maintaining the schools we already have; and making responsible long-range use of capital dollars. CCSD already

incorporates enrollment projections and future student population changes into its facility planning, including the Phase VI capital program. Good growth planning means building where we need to build, preserving what we need to preserve, and staying ahead (100)

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