

**2024 LCEA Candidate Interviews, Questionnaires,
Endorsement, & Donation Information**

This document was developed by LCEA leadership to inform members and local voters about the process and candidates running for office in Lake County, FL.



Edited: 7.25.24

Candidate Questionnaires:

- Each candidate running for office in Lake County for School Board, FL State House, and FL State Senate were contacted for an interview and they were sent the uniform FEA questionnaire.
- All questions are developed using only education topics. NO OTHER TOPICS are considered or discussed.
- See the questionnaire questions in the linked questionnaires below

Candidate Interviews:

- During candidate interviews candidates are asked to elaborate on their responses from the questionnaire as well as some additional questions specific to Lake County Schools.
- Interviews are conducted by LCEA members. Any member that wishes to be a part of the Political and Lobbying Committee can attend the interviews.
- This year there were 5+ members that attended each interview.

Name	Background/Expertise	Years of Experience
Kathy Smith	ELA and gifted, K-8	40+
Elisabeth Emery	High School Biology & Psychology	12
Tamara Russell	Fourth Grade Math & Science	28
Deanne Plemmons	Elementary, ESE	20
Sandra Scott	ELA & Reading Middle School	20
Lilly Jenkins	ELA Middle School	20
Tessa Clark	High School Biology, AP Env., AICE Env	25
David Lopez	High School and Middle School ESE	28
Ed Anderson	Elementary Music	20

Political Endorsements & Donations:

- How are endorsements of candidates done at LCEA and how are donations done at LCEA?
 - Endorsements and donations are conducted through a separate committee of members with in LCEA know as a Political Action Committee (PAC)
 - This is true of our affiliates as well- FEA, NEA, AFT, AFL-CIO etc.

- **IMPORTANT: No union dues EVER go towards political campaigns. These are separate funds given by members who indicated they wanted to give separate funds to the PACs.**
- You can give to the affiliates separately if you would like:
 - <https://educationvotes.nea.org/donate/>
 - <https://www.aft.org/cope>

Another **NONPARTISAN** resource to compare candidates is the League of Women Voters at VOTE411.org

MEMBERS: CALL OR EMAIL THE OFFICE FOR OUR SPECIAL ELECTION NEWSLETTER WITH THE ENDORSEMENTS!

The LCEA PAC reviewed the candidate questionnaires, candidate interview notes and has shared this information with members via zoom on July 25th. As a result, the membership voted to endorse **Mollie Cunningham for School Board District 4**. See the candidate information.

2024 Local Candidate Interviews and Questionnaires

Date	Time slots	Candidates
July 16th	2 -4 PM	Truenow, Keith (REP) - July 16th @ 2 PM CLICK HERE FOR QUESTIONNAIRE
July 17th	9 AM – 12 Noon 1 – 4 PM	Gavin Rollins - July 17th @ 9 AM CLICK HERE FOR QUESTIONNAIRE Mollie R Cunningham - July 17th @ 11 AM CLICK HERE FOR QUESTIONNAIRE Arndt, Jackie (DEM) - July 17th @ 1 PM CLICK HERE FOR QUESTIONNAIRE Kou, Bowen (REP)- July 17th @ 2:30 PM CLICK HERE FOR QUESTIONNAIRE

Candidate Information

School Board District 4	Website/Contact	Questionnaire/ Interview
Mollie R Cunningham	https://molliecunningham.com/	RETURNED, July 17 th @ 11 AM
Gavin Rollins	https://gavinrollins.com/	RETURNED, July 17 th @ 9 AM Canceled interview - rescheduled for 7.24 @ 1 PM
State Senate District 13		
Blancett, "C J" (REP)	https://www.cjblancettforflorida.com/	Did not respond
Dukes, Stephanie L. (DEM)		Did not respond

Kou, Bowen (REP)	https://www.electbowen.com/	RETURNED, July 17 th @ 2:30 PM
Truenow, Keith (REP)	https://keithtruenow.com/	RETURNED, July 16 th @ 2 PM
State House of Representatives District 25		
Merritt Jr, Fody (DEM)	Merritf1@earthlink.net	Did not respond
Yarkosky, Taylor (REP) *Incumbent	https://www.taylorarkosky.com/	Did not respond
State House of Representatives District 26		
Arndt, Jackie (DEM)	Jackie4HD26@gmail.com	RETURNED, July 17 th @ 1 pm
Cobb, Nan (REP)	https://www.nancobb.com/ ncobb2024@gmail.com	Did not respond
Farner, Keith (REP)	Kfarner61@gmail.com	Did not respond
Levine, Mike (REP)	https://www.mikelevineforflorida.com/	Did not respond
Owens, Addie (REP)	https://voteaddie.com/ addieowenscampaign@electioneeringconsulting.com	Did not respond
State House of Representatives District 27		
Ferrari, Andy (DEM)	https://www.ferrariforflorida.com/	Did not respond
Gentry, Richard (REP)	https://voterichardgentry.com/	Did not respond
Shives, Steve (REP)	https://www.shivesforflorida.com/	Did not respond
Simpson Jr, Dennis M. (LPF)		Did not respond
Sirolli, Beckie (REP)		Did not respond

District	Candidate	Status	Primary	General
13	Blancett, "C J" (REP)	Qualified		
	Dukes, Stephanie L. (DEM)	Qualified	Unopposed	
	Kou, Bowen (REP)	Qualified		
	Truenow, Keith (REP)	Qualified		

District	Candidate	Status	Primary	General
25	Merritt Jr, Fody (DEM)	Qualified	Unopposed	
	Yarkosky, Taylor (REP) *Incumbent	Qualified	Unopposed	
26	Arndt, Jackie (DEM)	Qualified	Unopposed	
	Cobb, Nan (REP)	Qualified		
	Farner, Keith (REP)	Qualified		
	Levine, Mike (REP)	Qualified		
	Owens, Addie (REP)	Qualified		
27	Ferrari, Andy (DEM)	Qualified	Unopposed	
	Gentry, Richard (REP)	Qualified		

	Shives, Steve (REP)	Qualified		
	Simpson Jr, Dennis M. (LPF)	Qualified		
	Sirolli, Beckie (REP)	Qualified		

Additional Interview Questions

Truenow State Senate:

Agenda:

Introductions of LCEA Political Advocacy Committee

Candidate

Introduction

Why they are running

Questions from their responses on the questionnaire:

- On the questions about specific positions - Can you expand upon specifically what you would like to see with funding, testing, and direct path to workforce education?
 1. **Would you address the compression for experienced educators currently in state law?**
 2. **You mention you want less testing but also mention an emphasis on early development for reading. Does this mean you would like more testing for early age groups? Explain?**
- On the question on teacher and staff shortages: **Can you explain what you mean by using contracts for effective educators?**
- On the question about potential funding deficits, you say you will work with the legislature.
 1. Since Florida is now 50th in average teachers salary, FEA has called on lawmakers to increase funding by 2.5 billion a year for the next 7 years. **Would you support this proposal?**
- On the question about funding and health care costs you mention retirement and healthcare is important for teacher retention and attraction. **How would you improve healthcare costs?**
 1. **Would you propose more funding to address health care costs coming out of the general fund for the district?**
- Question about school choice - you state you support school choice but do not address the questions about accountability. **What accountability and oversight for tax dollars would you support if any for private, charters, and other non-traditional schools?**
- Question about school safety - **Would you support additional funding and resources to ensure our schools are safe for all?**
- We really appreciate how accommodating you have been in meeting with our educators and leaders but often you have voted against our positions on bills related to public education and unions. We also have not seen a practice of reaching out to gain information about our educators' concerns about specific policy. We want to develop a relationship where we can have a dialogue and work together to improve public education in Lake County. We also understand the political climate and the pressures legislators feel from their leadership, but believe there are ways we can still work together to improve things.
 1. **Why did you vote for and support those positions for example with SB 256?**
 2. **How can we work together to create a space where you feel you can reach out for information from us and consider our position when voting for policy?**

Next steps-

- The committee will review the responses and will share the information with our members to decide on an endorsement.
- We will notify the candidate of our decision by the Week of July 29th for the primary and by August 30 for the general election.

Rollins School Board

Agenda:

Introductions of LCEA Political Advocacy Committee

Candidate

Introduction

Why they are running

Questions from their responses on the questionnaire:

- You say you want to focus on American History - what about the other subject areas?
- You say you want to expand teacher recognition programs - Can you explain specifically what you would do differently?
- Why did you come to Lake?
- How many years of experience in the classroom? How many as an administrator?
- You mention compensation and salary is your top issue for retention - How well do you know how teachers are paid in the state of florida? What about the salary in Lake?
- You mention you support school choice - Do you believe non-traditional school options should have the same accountability and oversight as traditional public schools?
- In the question about education unions you state it should be collaborative- Were you in the union? If not, why? Do you believe educators should have a right to collectively organize in their union?
- You mention that admin should have proper training for discipline - what training would you suggest? What would it look like?

Next steps-

- The committee will review the responses and will share the information with our members to decide on an endorsement.
- We will notify the candidate of our decision by the Week of July 29th for the primary and by August 30 for the general election.

Mollie School Board

Agenda:

- Introductions of LCEA Political Advocacy Committee
- Candidate
 - a. Introduction
 - b. Why they are running
 - c. Questions from their responses on the questionnaire:
 - i. What would you propose working to improve working conditions?
 - ii. What is your plan to address your number one priority of teacher compensation? If we came up with a compensation plan that would address salary compression, can we count on your support?
 - iii. What are some of the ideas you have to address the student discipline concerns?
 - iv. What specifically have you done while a school board member for educators?
 - v. Do you believe there should be accountability and oversight for nontraditional public schools?
 - vi. How often do you get to interact with state legislators? Would you set up conversations to work with them?
 - vii. What committees do you think we should develop or expand to make sure there is input in decisions?
 - viii. Were you a union member when you were a teacher?
- **Next steps-**
 - i. The committee will review the responses and will share the information with our members to decide on an endorsement.
 - ii. We will notify the candidate of our decision by the Week of July 29th for the primary and by August 30 for the general election.

Bowen State Senate

Agenda:

- Introductions of LCEA Political Advocacy Committee
- Candidate
 - a. Introduction
 - b. Why they are running
 - c. Questions from their responses on the questionnaire:
 - i. How long have you lived in LC and the state of Florida? You mention you are running because you believe in the American Dream. Why didn't you run for a Federal race? Why are you running for a state based race and in Lake County?
 - ii. When you say lobbyists and special interest support handpicked candidates could you explain and give an example?
 - iii. Could you explain more about your education experience?
 - iv. You mention you would like to increase funding -
 - How familiar are you with how educators are paid in the state of FL?
 - Since Florida is now 50th in average teachers salary, FEA has called on lawmakers to increase funding by 2.5 billion a year for the next 7 years. Would you support this proposal?
 - v. You mention educational achievement and equity - can you explain what you mean by equity?
 - vi. You mention closing tax loopholes and progressive tax adjustment- could you explain what specifically you mean and how that would be implemented at the state level?
 - vii. You mention formative assessments in the question with high stakes testing - does that mean you want to eliminate testing?
 - viii. Can you explain logistically how you would do all the items listed under your plan to collect input from community members.
 - ix. Can you explain how you would implement restorative practices?
 - x. Can you explain your experiences with unions and your beliefs about working with unions?
- **Next steps-**
 - i. The committee will review the responses and will share the information with our members to decide on an endorsement.
 - ii. We will notify the candidate of our decision by the Week of July 29th for the primary and by August 30 for the general election.