



Williamson County School Board Candidate Survey

Dr. Margie Johnson

Note: These are short answer and yes/no questions. Please be brief and to the point.

1. Why are you running for Williamson County School Board?

I am running for this office for two reasons. First, public education is my lifelong passion. I have had this passion for public education since I started as a kindergartner myself. I was the first in my family to attend and graduate from college. I went on to obtain my doctorate degree in educational leadership in 2014, and have had a successful career as a middle school teacher, regional educational consultant, and district administrator. Currently, I am the parent of three amazing sons, and an active volunteer in my community and our schools.

Secondly, I feel a deep calling to be a representative for WCS district 5 school board. I have a strong ambition to further serve my community, and its students. I remember looking online in 2018 about running for this office, and learning that I had to wait until 2020. I was the first candidate to pull my petition during the 2020 election, ran an ethical, fiscally conservative campaign, and lost by fewer than 300 votes. I was proud of my campaign in 2020 as it was a great learning experience and allowed me to meet so many wonderful district 5 constituents.

For the past 3 years, I have been asked continually by community leaders, parents, and educators if I planned to run in 2024. After much consideration and prayer, I again feel led to run for this office. I want to continue to serve my community by using my extensive experience in education and as a parent to advocate for ALL children and constituents in district 5. When the time comes, I hope you'll honor me with your vote, as I intend to be a child champion and advocate for a great education for all WCS students.

2. What do you believe is the most important role of a school board member?

School board members have 4 responsibilities—hiring and evaluating the director of schools; establishing vision, mission, and strategic planning for the district; reviewing existing policies and proposing new ones to govern the district; and providing fiscal accountability for taxpayer's money given to the district to fund education. While all of these roles are important, the most important one is hiring and evaluating the director of schools. As John Maxwell says,

“Everything rises and falls on leadership.” As a school board member, I am committed to ensuring WCS has the best educational leader in the country at the helm providing the best education possible for our students and families.

3. Of the current policies in place at Williamson County Schools, are there any that concern you, or that you would want to be brought forward for review? If so, which one(s)?

Two policies that constituents keep bringing to my attention that I will work to address first are:

- WCS Board Policy 4.401 states, "A complaint about Board approved textbooks, instructional materials and supplementary instructional materials may only be made by a current WCS parent/guardian, employee, or student." This policy was updated in October 2022 and I do not agree with it. This policy takes away the voice of some taxpayers, which is not right. Remember the Boston Tea Party, “No taxation without representation.” The same goes for this policy as every taxpayer has the right to be heard.
- WCS Board Policy 4.403 states, “A complaint about library materials may only be made by a current WCS employee, student, or parent/guardian.” This policy was updated May 15, 2023. Again, I do not agree with this statement as all Williamson County residents pay taxes that support the school district; therefore, any Williamson County resident should have the right to file a complaint.

These are two specific policies; however, I look forward to reviewing them all and asking strategic questions to ensure the policies are current in representing WCS families.

4. We know that part of the attraction of private schools is the smaller class size and smaller overall school size. Do you think the size of the classroom impacts the relationship between the teacher and student as well as the quality of education? If so, what do you think should be done about it?

Dr. John Hattie did extensive research on 252 factors affecting student achievement and reports about it in his book entitled, *Visible Learning*. While smaller class size did have a positive effect on student achievement, there are many other factors with a larger return on investment. For example, the factor affecting student achievement the most is teacher efficacy. Therefore, I plan to take a deep dive into the budget to see how we can strategically reallocate money to ensure Williamson County has the best educators in the country educating our children.

5. What is your opinion of the 5 year, nearly \$1B capital budget that was just approved?

I am fiscally conservative. Before asking for this amount of money, the school board needed to take a deep dive into the current student enrollment numbers and school capacity data. I doubt that all schools are at full capacity. If that is the case, then a major rezoning similar to the one the Rutherford County School board did would be my recommendation before building a new school with taxpayer money, especially given the fact that the debt in Williamson County has doubled since 2018.

6. Do you support taxpayer dollars being used to give parents school choice? What do you think would make public schools more competitive with nonpublic schools?

Public schools were established to serve the community in which they reside. Schools should be the hub of the local community preparing students for their futures. Unfortunately, the increased governmental overreach of state and federal governments starting in the 1990's has been detrimental to local public schools. As a result, many parents are not happy with their local public school as evident by the increased numbers of students attending private schools, charter schools, and home schools. This governmental overreach needs to stop. Local school boards need to take back their schools and serve the families in the counties in which they reside. Particularly here in Williamson County where we have the best schools in the state, our local educators should be empowered to establish curriculum maps and engaging instructional lessons. WCS should not be purchasing scripted ineffective curriculum being offered by the TN Department of Education, where lobbyists have advocated for the product NOT educators. I believe if schools returned back to the basics of a strong foundation of reading, writing, math, science and social studies curriculum that was not trying to indoctrinate students then more parents would choose public schools.

Regarding giving taxpayer dollars to parents for school choice, I want to briefly explain charter schools and vouchers as both of these programs allow for taxpayer dollars to be funneled to school choice. The difference is who ultimately gets to make the choice for where the taxpayer dollars goes. Charter schools are approved by local and/or state school board. Once a school is established, then a parent may choose to send their child to that school. Some people argue that at least charter schools are governed by the local school board; however, that is not the full story. Charter schools still are allowed to not follow the same rules that local public schools have to follow. Currently, \$200 million dollars of Metro Schools budget goes to charter schools. WCS has not approved any charter schools, so the WCS budget has not been affected. A voucher allows the parent or guardian to decide the best educational option for the child, whether it is private school or home school. I am all about empowering families to do what is best for their child. My concern with the taxpayer dollars following the child, particularly the proposed voucher program by Governor Bill Lee is it will cripple the existing local public schools by pulling money away from their existing budgets. Instead, I would love to see increased educator empowerment and community collaboration to work to make Williamson County Schools the first choice for all WCS students and families.

7. Do you believe that teachers should be free to express ideological or political opinions in the classroom, or that a certain ideology should be part of a student's education? Or do you believe that historical facts should be taught from source documents without the prejudice of personal beliefs?

Children are very impressionable, particularly the younger they are. Therefore, personal beliefs and opinions have no place in the classroom as families need to teach these beliefs to their children. For example, when I was a middle school science teacher, even though I am a

Christian and a Republican, I did not hang a cross or Republican flag in my classroom nor did I teach students about my beliefs. Instead, I taught them without a scripted science curriculum with teacher created evidence-based, engaging lessons that actively engaged them in learning science content and develop their critical thinking and problem solving skills.

Historical facts do need to be taught from source documents without prejudice.

8. Do issues such as white privilege, DEI or CRT have any place in our classrooms?

This question is similar to question 7 above as these are personal beliefs as not all families believe in these constructs. Therefore, they should not be taught in our classrooms. Instead, schools need to focus on providing high-quality, evidence-based instruction in reading, math, writing, science, and social studies and quit trying to teach ideological beliefs to impressionable children.

9. Do you believe that lesson plans, reading lists, textbooks, online sources, etc. should be accessible to parents as well as to all Williamson County taxpayers?

According to WCS board policy 4.200, parental and community involvement is encouraged in curriculum development and middle school and high school teachers are to make their syllabi “publicly available” for general education courses. WCS already has their scope and sequence documents posted online for public review (<https://www.wcs.edu/domain/1189>). It seems that policies are in place to ensure public participation. The issue might be with the procedures used to engage the public. For example, one idea I have for increasing public engagement in curriculum development is to go back to what was done when I first started teaching in the late 1990s. Instead of having scripted curriculum adopted from the state, local school districts paid teachers stipends to be on the district curriculum committees. I was on the science committee where we met to create curriculum maps (scope and sequence documents) for the district. We also would collaborate to create lessons to be accessible and used by other teachers in the district. There were also parent and community members represented on the committees. It was a very empowering experience that helped to ensure that my students learned information most relevant to them and allowed me to collaborate with educators across the district to ensure high-quality, evidence-based lessons were being delivered to students.

10. Are parental rights subservient to the rights of Williamson County Schools? Why or Why not?

Parental rights are not subservient to the rights of WCS. As the parent of my sons, I have the authority to make decisions that are best for my sons. While at school, WCS employees are given the right to ensure my children are safe; however, they do not have more authority than me. Even in the WCS Parent Bill of Rights, it states that I can “access information about all services available for your child.” Furthermore, those services should not be administered without my permission.

11. We all agree that students should be held accountable for bad behavior.

- a. Who do you believe should define what “bad behavior” is?
- b. How would you define bad behavior?
- c. What do you think should be done to hold students accountable?

WCS board policy 6.300 defines levels of “bad behavior” and “disciplinary options.” Upon reviewing the policy, I agree with it. However, policy and implementation sometimes get lost in translation. From stories I have heard from some parents, it seems that the policy is not being followed in a standardized manner across WCS, which is not uncommon for large school districts. My recommendation would be to bring school administrators together to calibrate around the district discipline policy and work to standardize practice across the district. Of course, part of that calibration process is to ensure that the educators are not “punished” for student behaviors and are given the authority to hold students accountable. This issue is

12. Do you feel that schools have the authority to punish students’ behavior that occurs outside of the classroom or school campus, such as on social media?

It depends. If the behavior involves other students and causes a disruption of the school day, then schools do have the authority to provide consequences for the student’s actions. Furthermore, WCS has a partnership with the WC Sheriff’s department, so the School Resource Officer should definitely be involved. If the incident does not disrupt the school environment, then the school should not get involved but leave it to local law enforcement.

13. What is your position on gun violence in schools, and how would you address this issue?

WCS has several great measures in place to ensure WCS students are safe, including the partnership with the WC Sheriff’s department that provides SROs on every campus and locked doors with an intercom entrance. As a result, WC has been fortunate not to have gun violence in our schools. Two other things I would advocate for is increased community involvement in our schools and prayer. The more presence of adults we can have on campuses, the better it is to deter a person who might want to do evil to students. I also believe in the power of prayer to deter evil from causing harm on our school campuses.

14. How do you plan to communicate with your constituents and how often?

As an elected public servant, communication is critical to successfully serving them. I will always be accessible via cell phone and email. Proactively, I plan to send out a Monthly Margie Memo and plan monthly coffee talks with constituents. I will ultimately work toward having an “advisory committee” where constituents can apply to help provide me with their perspectives on upcoming school board policy and budgetary considerations.

15. When did you join the Williamson County Republican Party and why?

I have always been a republican due to my beliefs in the limited role of government and fiscal conservatism. I did not become involved in the WCRP until summer 2023 after I made the official decision to run again for the WCS Board, District 5 seat. I joined it to network and support conservative values in the county in which I live.