

9 QUESTIONS FROM



CAMPAIGN TO ELECT HENRY 'SHAKE' WASHINGTON TO HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD, DISTRICT 5

1. Why are you running? If elected, what would be your top goals as school board member?

I am running to ensure all students in District 5 especially, receive a quality education. My top goals include improving educational equity, supporting teachers with competitive salaries and professional development, enhancing school safety, and increasing community engagement. With my extensive experience as an assistant teacher, principal, and area superintendent, I am committed to creating an inclusive, supportive, and high-performing educational environment for all students.

2. What can be done to ensure everyone who graduates is either ready for college or a vocation?

Expand Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, enhance college readiness initiatives, establish internships and apprenticeships, and develop individualized learning plans. These steps will provide practical skills, college counseling, real-world experience, and tailored support to ensure every graduate is prepared for their next step.

3. How should the district address underperforming schools?

Implement targeted interventions, use data-driven strategies, engage community stakeholders, and provide incentives for high-performing educators to work in underperforming schools. These approaches will address specific needs, improve student outcomes, and create a supportive environment for both students and teachers.

4. Local and state initiatives have been launched to address the need for more teachers in our classrooms. What more do you think needs to be done to recruit and retain teachers in your district?

Increase teacher salaries and benefits, create a supportive work environment, offer ongoing professional development, establish mentorship programs, and regularly recognize and appreciate teachers. These measures will attract and retain high-quality educators, ensuring a stable and effective teaching workforce.

5. What is your stance on the state's current school choice program?

I support school choice with accountability and transparency, ensuring all schools meet high standards. Public schools must be adequately funded, and choice programs should be accessible to all students. Equity and quality must be maintained across the board.

6. Does school testing really give an accurate portrayal of the education quality/experience of a school?

Standardized testing provides some insights but doesn't capture the full picture. We need holistic assessments, evaluate school climate, and focus on student growth over time to get a comprehensive view of educational quality and experience.

7. Issues surrounding gender, sexuality, and race have created controversy between school boards and parents. How much say should parents have in deciding what is and is not included in the public school curriculum?

Parents should have a voice in curriculum decisions through inclusive development processes and transparent communication. However, educational standards and expert knowledge must guide the curriculum to ensure it is inclusive, diverse, and prepares students for a global society.

8. Do you feel students are safe at school? Or does more need to be done to protect school campuses?

While many safety measures are in place, more can be done. Implement comprehensive safety plans, increase mental health support, conduct regular safety drills, and strengthen partnerships with law enforcement to enhance school safety and preparedness.

9. Do you feel any changes are needed to your district's budget? Is money being spent in the right places?

Continuous evaluation is necessary. Focus on equitable resource allocation, prioritize teacher salaries and professional development, invest in infrastructure improvements, and maintain transparency and accountability in budget decisions to support district goals and improve education quality.

9 QUESTIONS FROM



Meet the Candidate: Kenneth Gay

Spectrum Questions

1. Why are you running? If elected, what would be your top goals as school board member?

My experience and education are well-suited to address the many issues our district is facing... I feel I've sat on the sidelines too long. I believe I have a VOICE whereby questions need to be raised to better redirect this school district's focus.

Top Goals are:

Addressing declining schools.... especially the Persistently Performing Low Schools!

Addressing retention of experienced educators and administrators.

Addressing absenteeism and its intervention/preventive practices need to be examined. Chronically absent children will not academically thrive if they're missing out!

2. What can be done to ensure everyone who graduates is either ready for college or a vocation?

Being fully transparent with parents and communicating the criteria/benchmarks throughout the child's educational walk is critical for awareness. It cannot just be addressed in the high school years. Administrators in each building should be publicly sharing the expectations within various forums regularly. Specifically, parents should continually be provided messaging in regular communications, beginning each school year K-12, and during the interim times, too, related to the Florida Statue 1003.4282 citing the "requirements for a standard high school diploma."

3. How should the district address underperforming schools?

My answer is intertwined in #4.

4. Local and state initiatives have been launched to address the need for more teachers in our classrooms. What more do you think needs to be done to recruit and retain teachers in your district?

Address the following key contributors:

Teacher and Administrator RETENTION which I find is due primarily to a lack of administrative support. i.e. effectively addressing heightened behaviors, building systems that assist teachers in planning effective/rigorous lessons;

Loss of experienced teachers by the reallocation of the “best of the best” teachers from the classrooms leaving the least experienced teachers in the classrooms to serve in Coaching positions;

Loss of experienced Administrators to other districts leaving less experienced to take their places. Many of our present administrators have not taught a minimum of ten years within a traditional classroom setting.;

Heightened intense behaviors/detractions contribute to declining schools and with less experienced teachers/administrators not equipped to manage challenging behaviors teachers/administrators are not focused on academics.

5. What is your stance on the state’s current school choice program?

Simply---as a parent, I want options and School Choice provides an alternative! I will add moving into a Charter school should not be done in haste. Not all Charter Schools, as true of our traditional, are not the same! A parent should do their homework reviewing every aspect of the facility. Understand the language within the Charter and request any questionable district review concerns. Attempt to make an unannounced tour of the campus. Take a read on the safety of the building. Examine the year-to-year results. Look at the data... specifically looking at trends i.e. Are gains being made? Especially with reading. Parents need to be familiar with how the needs of their child, specifically specialized needs, will be addressed i.e. LEP, ESE. Questions should be prepared regarding teacher(s) credentials and the history of service.... know who will be standing in front of your child each day!

6. Does school testing really give an accurate portrayal of the education quality/experience of a school?

Tracking a child’s performance is necessary for meeting the needs throughout a child's academic walk. Specific measures are required in the determination of how to address the next steps and for short-term as well as long-term planning. Measures/instruments of evaluating children should be balanced and conducted during optimal times during a school year and never to excess. Measures should always focus on Screening & Progress Monitoring, Core Instruction, and Evidence-Based Interventions.

7. Issues surrounding gender, sexuality and race have created controversy between school boards and parents. How much say should parents have in deciding what is and is not included in the public school curriculum?

Curriculum related to the awareness of how our bodies evolve—those physical changes that take place, I feel are necessary for students to have the opportunity to gain a clinical, biological, and/or physiological perspective. Specifically, Human Growth and Development is what I'm referring to---but we must refrain from the explicit side of the spectrum. All curricula must be well vetted, with a balanced systematic approach, and as a parent, I would expect to review the curriculum maps well in advance of implementation. Should there be areas that I find would be controversial, as a parent, I would reserve the right to waive my child from being exposed to the materials. And the issue, that seems to be a continuing topic of concern, Pronoun Usage, I'll just state this: I've yet to hear anyone sitting through an ultrasonogram describe the growth in the woman's body displayed on the screen, when the gender is described, anything other than it's a boy or a girl---a he or she.

8. Do you feel students are safe at school? Or does more need to be done to protect school campuses?

John Newman, the Chief of Security for HCPS, in my opinion, does an outstanding job keeping our building secure. Protocols and procedures are well established due to his leadership. In my tenure over the last few years, he routinely/regularly met with administration always emphasizing, modeling, and encouraging the continued push to take the information back to our buildings and proactively prepare for worst-case scenarios.

9. Do you feel any changes are needed to your district's budget? Is money being spent in the right places?

Management of the 4.3 billion budget is not properly carried out with HCPS. My understanding the state has recently provided a large increase in student funding allocation which appears to be an opportunity to provide teacher salaries without promoting a milage/property tax increase.

Elvis Piggott

Hillsborough County School Board, District 5

1. Why are you running? If elected, what would be your top goals as school board member?

For over 18 years, I have actively served our community as a local pastor, advocating for and supporting our youth. I am dedicated to ensuring that every student receives a quality education. I believe in the power of community and collaboration. Together, we can create policies that benefit our schools and enhance student outcomes.

My top three priorities include attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers, reducing the number of certificates of completion, and ensuring schools have the resources they need to succeed. By increasing literacy rates, we can help neighborhood schools attract and retain students, preventing the risk of school closures.

2. What can be done to ensure everyone who graduates is either ready for college or a vocation?

I am a firm believer in deliberate progress monitoring of all of our students specifically in high school to ensure students have the credits they need to graduate. If they are struggling, the tracking will allow counselors, teachers, and administrators to provide support and interventions in a timely manner to get students back on track to graduate.

3. How should the district address underperforming schools?

The primary issue that needs to be addressed is the number of vacancies in our schools. Without highly qualified teachers in front of students, we cannot achieve success. Additionally, we must implement interventions and supports for literacy from Pre-K through second grade to ensure students are proficient in reading by third grade. Empowering parents to be active partners in their child's education is also crucial, ensuring students arrive at school every day ready to learn and contribute to their school community.

4. Local and state initiatives have been launched to address the need for more teachers in our classrooms. What more do you think needs to be done to recruit and retain teachers?

This is a critical need at the national, state, and district levels. We must strengthen partnerships with colleges and universities to attract recent graduates. Additionally, we should explore innovative affordable housing options. Collaborating with local businesses to offer teacher incentives and discounts can also be a strong attractor. It is essential to review our budget, eliminate waste, and cut excessive costs from unused contracts to reallocate more funds towards teacher salaries.

5. What is your stance on the state's current school choice program?

I advocate for school choice, believing that parents should have the option to place their child in an environment that supports, nurtures, and fosters academic growth. Additionally, I am committed to ensuring that our neighborhood schools are equipped with the necessary tools and resources to support student success.

6. Does school testing really give an accurate portrayal of the education quality/experience of a school?

I believe it is a crucial measure of how students are performing relative to their peers across the state of Florida in mastering grade-level benchmarks and standards. While it provides a snapshot of student performance on a specific day, I also place significant value on perception surveys from students, parents, and teachers to comprehensively understand and shape the student experience at a school.

7. Issues surrounding gender, sexuality and race have created controversy between school boards and parents. How much say should parents have in deciding what is and is not included in the public school curriculum?

The public school curriculum should prioritize core subjects such as Reading, Writing, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. Any additional content beyond the state-approved curriculum standards should require parental approval through an opt-in process.

8. Do you feel students are safe at school? Or does more need to be done to protect school campuses?

We can enhance the safety of our school campuses by reinstating clear expectations for student conduct, ensuring a secure environment for both learning and teaching. It's crucial to monitor behavior and discipline data consistently. Teachers may require additional support and coaching to manage behaviors proactively and positively. Listening to students and incorporating their feedback through perception surveys is essential in developing effective systems and protocols for a safe school community.

9. Do you feel any changes are needed to your district's budget? Is money being spent in the right places?

Yes, the budget requires a thorough review to identify and eliminate wasteful and excessive spending. This includes discontinuing funding for obsolete programs and evaluating district position salaries for potential elimination or streamlining. Our goal should be to reallocate these funds to increase teacher salaries within our existing budget.

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1. Why are you running? If elected, what would be your top goals as school board member?
I am running for re-election to restore effective and proactive leadership to the District 5 seat. Once re-elected my priorities are increasing student achievement, teacher attraction and retention, and improving the budget.
2. What can be done to ensure everyone who graduates is either ready for college or a vocation?
It is the duty of the school district to ensure every student is prepared for post-graduation life; whether that is the work force, college, or a vocational career. Holding the Superintendent accountable for providing the necessary resources, programs, and supports is a paramount duty of an effective and experienced school board member.
3. How should the district address underperforming schools?
This must be a priority. With Hillsborough leading the state with the highest number of low-performing schools, it is time for a radical change. An intense focus on moving highly effective teachers into these schools, eliminating substitute teachers, increasing resources, and engaging the parents and the community are critical. The district should deeply partner with early childhood centers and educators and work closely with other local government agencies in helping to stabilize communities so that education can also become stable (high mobility and absenteeism must be eliminated).
4. Local and state initiatives have been launched to address the need for more teachers in our classrooms. What more do you think needs to be done to recruit and retain teachers in your district?
Teachers MUST be paid more and provided with adequate support.
5. What is your stance on the state's current school choice program?
I support choice, however public education should always be a family's first choice! HCPS must work to improve the quality of education, improve its school buildings and offer programs that are attractive to families. As a school board member, I will not fight against charters or private schools, but rather focus on making HCPS the first and only choice.
6. Does school testing really give an accurate portrayal of the education quality/experience of a school?
School grades/testing are often seen as a representation of the school experience however it does not always tell the entire story. There are often many factors, complex issues, that may affect a student's performance that may be beyond and outside of the control of the school;

such as low attendance, parental disengagement, misbehavior, and reluctant classroom participation. Grades should only be considered a representation of the school experience when complete context is also given.

7. Issues surrounding gender, sexuality and race have created controversy between school boards and parents. How much say should parents have in deciding what is and is not included in the public school curriculum?

Parents have a voice in the education system as it pertains to their children; not other children. As a board member, I believe allowing parents the choice to opt-out their children from certain curriculum is appropriate. I do not support sweeping changes at the urging of a vocal few.

8. Do you feel students are safe at school? Or does more need to be done to protect school campuses?

Students are safe but safety is a fluid policy. Safety must always be monitored and amended as the environment changes or simply as often as needed. Keeping staff and students safe is always top priority.

9. Do you feel any changes are needed to your district's budget? Is money being spent in the right places?

All school districts are underfunded. There is simply not enough funds ever available to adequately operate a district. Once re-elected, I will continue my advocacy in pushing Tallahassee to make education a priority and properly fund HCPS. While that is being done, I will work closely with the Superintendent and his staff to ensure funds are being allocated appropriately .