

Jim Bonner, Republican Candidate for State Board of Education District 7

1. Describe the qualifications and experiences you would bring to the State Board of Education and how your contributions would be an asset to the work of the Board.

As a 30 year educator with 14 additional years of experience in industry, coupled with higher degrees from several Alabama colleges, I would bring to the table a unique understanding of how and why Alabama's public schools are failing.

I also plan to be full time. I consider the work of the Board to be as important as the work of the cooks and janitors, and if they can work six hours every day so can I.

I will personally visit every school in the district and interview every ninth grade teacher. I will make it my mission to find out why Johnny can't read in Alabama.

2. As a State Board of Education member, what would you do to improve the academic preparation of students as well as their transition to higher education or other post-high- school training?

The question itself brings to the table the critical issue with failing schools in Alabama. The idea that we can cure the ills of the poor and underachieving students by getting them to walk across the stage for a diploma belies the fact that Johnny can't read.

Educators, like myself, have been indoctrinated with the idea that graduation equals success. It does not. It does not even guarantee an education. It turns educators into paperhangers.

Our goal in education must return to the idea that education is the goal, not graduation. And in the current system success in life, happiness, marriage, home, children are not necessarily compatible with post high school training.

WE MUST PREPARE STUDENTS TO GET AND KEEP A JOB WHILE THEY ARE IN K-12. We can no longer expect college and technical schools to do that job for us.

3. Please state two or three key goals you want the State Board of Education to accomplish during your term of office.

This is a one issue campaign. "Why Johnny can't read."

If you walk into any 9th grade English classroom in Alabama and ask the teacher what makes her life difficult. What makes her want to quit and move to Georgia, What impediment to education keeps her from doing her job? She won't say it's her low pay, she won't say it's her huge class size, she won't say its uncomfortable classrooms or shortage of supplies.. She will say it is the new eighth graders she gets every year who are reading on the fourth grade level.

Why are they in her class? Why did the eighth grade teacher pass them on .. The answer is complex.. It involves age and hormones and social promotion and IEPs and special education requirements.

But ultimately it's because the eighth grade teacher didn't want them either.

AND - The students don't want to be there. They make it a personal goal to ruin the education experience for the teacher who wants to teach and the student who wants to learn. Currently there is no mechanism to provide an alternate exit point for student who does not want to be in the classroom.

The legislature has been an accomplice in turning our teachers into paper hangers by passing laws that prohibit 16 year old students from taking jobs, earning money legitimately instead of on the streets, even getting a driver's license, unless they can read Hamlet.

4. Do you believe Alabama's current system for funding public education provides adequate support to schools across Alabama? Please explain your position.

I have long said that to provide a competitive education in an internet connected society the fiscal allocation for classroom connectivity and teaching resources should equal the salary of the teacher. That would mean doubling the Education Trust Fund allocation from 6 to 12 Billion dollars.

This would mean increasing sales tax from four to eight percent.

This would mean increasing the state income tax from 5% to 10%.

Either those things - or cutting the salary of the teacher.

This idea gets little traction from the Alabama taxpayer, or the teachers Union. To no surprise to me.

The average student in Alabama lives in a household that struggles to buy personal hygiene supplies for themselves and we ask them to bring toilet paper and hand sanitizer to class?

Why..?

Because on a six billion dollar budget we can't afford it? No, we can afford it, we simply choose to allocate the funding unwisely.

I personally have a workable plan to solve the problem. But, it's not a plan that AEA finds palatable. It simply would put students first and support their needs by making master level teachers managers. Managers of classroom content and of apprentice teachers instead of babysitters for unruly students.

5. Do you believe school choice, including public charter schools and tax credit scholarships, improves the education of children in your district? Please explain your position.

Not directly. It does interject the competitive market into the public school setting. Teachers in failing schools can no longer rest comfortably on their public paycheck.

The real question is why do failing schools exist in the first place.

My gut feeling is that if charter schools are allowed they should be allowed everywhere, without regard to the success or failure of an individual school. I do not support tax credit scholarships to help pay private school tuition for the rich.

However, no boy or girl from a low income household should be forced to attend a failing school if they have the academic ability to succeed in a private school but are restricted by financial resources.

Tax credit tuition programs for the poor are a good idea if the student has shown academic promise which will be suppressed by being forced into a mediocre school.

6. Do you believe student performance on annual standardized tests is a fair criterion to assess teacher effectiveness? Please explain your position.

Absolutely not.

Standardized tests have become so politically biased that they are unlikely to demonstrate anything about the teacher. The home conditions the attitude of the student and the likelihood of finding jobs in the community are a hidden hand in standardization assessment.

They are effective in identifying student strengths, and aptitude for employment. They should be used to direct students into career choice and to plan for college. But evaluating me on how well you do on a test is senseless.

7. Do you believe Alabama's public schools, and the people working in schools, are doing enough in our schools to protect and improve the lives of our most vulnerable children, including those at risk due to family poverty and students with disabilities? Please explain your position.

We are hamstrung by a liberal PC society who is willing to sacrifice the lives of our children to make a political point. A recent killing in a no gun zone in Hamilton Alabama and the strangulation death of one of my classmates by her ID tag lanyard in Decatur brings home the point that the death toll would have been one less if people had not had to "go back to the car" for their gun.

In Israel Pre-K teachers have machine guns. We don't have to go that far to protect our students.. Yet.. But, as political unrest escalates the need for armed security in our schools is going to get more pronounced. It goes back to our education allotment and how we should share funding burdens for our protection with the local sheriff department to provide armed professional guards at the ratio of one per 800 students, and to allow teachers to be trained and licensed to carry to protect themselves.

We arm the men who deliver money to your bank. How much more sense does it make to arm the driver who delivers our children to school.

8. Do you believe the legislature or the state board of education should take the lead in proposing major reform initiatives for public education? Please explain your position.

Absolutely, We need to explore all alternatives. Including but not limited to bidding the job to private contractors if they can do a better job.

- To printing our own individualized textbooks. (at a multi-million dollar savings)

- To individualized instruction and the creation of 16 year old vocational exit points .

- To intervention for students who are doing poorly in school for lack of parental involvement.

- To intervention for students who are addicted to the web.

Right now we have truancy boards for students who miss school too much but no program to intervene

for the student who can't concentrate because he was up all night playing Grand Theft Auto and Call of Duty.

Nothing should be off the table.

Because we have tried throwing money at the problem and it hasn't worked.

9. How can you, as a state board of education member, positively impact the national view of Alabama's K-12 educational system?

I am not at all sure I can, or would want to, bring Alabama standards down to national levels.

Personally I will work with the teachers and legislators to provide a strong vocational component to our high schools.

I will be a leader in elimination of the failed common core.

I will do what i can to promote program funding to fill the gap created when the Alabama College System chose to leave the K-12 system.

I see an opportunity to rebuild K-12 education and create industrial desire and job growth.

The purpose of K-12 education is to help students get and keep a job, ultimately eliminate poverty in Alabama and support our State.

Teachers will no longer be paper hangers. And CNN will tell you about it.