

**Chattanooga Area Chamber of Commerce
2008 Hamilton County Board of Education
Candidate Questionnaire**

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District: 2

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1. In what specific classroom/instructional areas do you feel additional funding is necessary and how would you provide that funding?

I believe that we should put at least 90% of the overall budget into the classroom, not the 84% that is currently the case (per CFO Tommy Kranz). This would result in an increase of at least \$20 million in classroom spending without an increase in taxes. Specifically, we should seek to improve pay for teachers who excel; adequately fund supply budgets; and ensure that each student has textbooks that are not falling apart. (In other words, make sure the basics of classroom learning are appropriately funded.) The funding for these areas should be taken from non-classroom expenditures. Administration, particularly the central office; and transportation, especially out-of-zone busing for students we are not required to transport, appear to be two areas that could be reduced to offset increased classroom spending.

2. How would you address the real or perceived increase in student behavioral problems?

The minority of students who are not in school to learn must be kept from disturbing the learning environment for the majority who are there to learn. We should make increased use of in-school suspension, alternative school(s), and in serious cases, expulsion of students from the system in order to achieve this. Leadership of the system must develop and display the resolve to fix these problems. That means we must have a strong, engaged school board that provides needed direction to the superintendent; a superintendent who selects (with the help of each school's community) strong principals for each school; who in turn exercise firm leadership and who support and empower teachers to return, and maintain, discipline in their classrooms.

3. What accountability measures will you pursue to identify areas of improvement in student achievement?

We already have a number of accountability measures that assess various aspects of student achievement. For example, seniors (and some juniors) in high school take the ACT or SAT college admissions test; recently, scores county-wide have declined, rather than increasing toward the goal set by the 2011 Strategic Plan. These tests have subtests in specific subject areas, as do other standardized tests taken by students in lower grades, so specific problem areas can be pinpointed. Of course there are other appropriate measures, but standardized instruments provide a basis for comparison that cannot easily be manipulated or artificially inflated.

The main thing that we need to do, whatever measurements of effectiveness we choose, is to create a mechanism that ties each student's performance back to his or her teachers in a given subject. For example, if students are assessed for reading skills in the 8th grade, their proficiency scores should be linked back to each of their reading teachers for the previous grades. Each teacher would receive a rating based on an aggregation of his or her former students' scores. In this manner we could identify and reward teachers who are doing their jobs well, and take appropriate actions to help the others improve (or find other employment if they cannot).

4. What accountability measures will you pursue to identify areas of improvement in administration and management?

This is a much more difficult area to measure quantitatively, but we certainly need to do our best to improve it. Principals should be held accountable for maintaining discipline in their schools and for the academic performance of their students. This should be based not just on year-to-year improvements, but on actual success. If a school tests at the 25th percentile one year and the 28th percentile the next, that is evidence of progress but not success; a principal whose school slips from the 97th percentile to the 95th in a given year is arguably doing a much better job, and should not be penalized unless the year-to-year decline becomes a trend.

As far as central office administration goes, I feel it is the superintendent's job to assess the performance of, and make any improvements/replacements needed in, his staff. However the school board should interact with and observe the superintendent and upper-level administrators at every opportunity. The recent extension of the superintendent's contract was premature because board members had not yet had sufficient time to evaluate the superintendent's performance. It also effectively disenfranchised the new school board members about to take office, and their constituents, from the evaluation process.

5. Do you support expanding the definition of charter schools to make it easier to establish and maintain such a school?

Yes. I am committed to equal opportunity and equal choice for all students and their parents. Charter schools, like "magnet" schools, should be open to all students – not just students who are failing or come from failing schools. By no means will I be a "rubber stamp" for charter school applications, but I do welcome them and will evaluate each with an open mind and keen attention to what unique opportunities they will offer students.

6. Do you believe the school board should have taxing authority or should that power remain with the county commission?

The school board should absolutely not have taxing authority. Anyone old enough to have taken a civics class in high school should remember that in America, government at all levels is divided into distinct entities with discrete functions. Just as legislators, the president, and the courts serve as checks and balances on each other's powers at the federal and state levels, the county commission and the school board have separate and distinct roles that should not be mixed. The fact that the school board manages the funds for schools that are allocated by the

county commission is a feature of the system, not a problem with it. Sometimes a little tension between the two bodies can be a good thing, as it leads to greater accountability for both.

7. How would you expand curriculum options to include more career/technical specialties?

I don't know that it is necessary or the best use of limited resources for us to have a great deal of *specialization* at each high school. I do think we need to re-examine the "single path" curriculum and provide alternative academic paths for students who intend to pursue vocational or technical careers rather than college. (As a UTC professor, I like to see students attend college, graduate, and move on to professional careers; but I recognize that college is not for everyone.) Most of the *specialized* training for specific vocational/technical careers is probably best done at the post-secondary level – for example at Chattanooga State Technical Community College or other local technical institutes.

8. Please describe your views regarding the concept and practice of career academies in high schools?

Career academies can be a good thing, as they provide choices for students and parents – and choice is a good thing. However, we must look closely at the costs of offering such programs and transporting students to the locations where they are offered. Most of all, we should not become so fixated on the career academy concept that we fail to provide adequate preparation in the basics. Students preparing for *any* career need to be able to read, write, and do math effectively; they need to learn the lessons of history and the basics of the "hard" and "soft" sciences. If students graduate without these skills, we have failed them no matter what career we have supposedly prepared them for in the academy.

Brief biography:

Dr. Joe Dumas, District 2 School Board candidate, is professor and acting head of UTC's Department of Computer Science and Engineering. He and his wife Chereé have been residents of Hamilton County for 15 years. Their two boys attended Hamilton County public schools before going on to college at MTSU.

Dr. Dumas was born and raised in Mobile, Alabama, the son of a firefighter and a stay-at-home mom. He is a first-generation college student who earned his bachelor's degree from the University of Southern Mississippi, his master's from Mississippi State University, and the Ph.D. in Computer Engineering from the University of Central Florida.

In addition to his position as acting department head, Dr. Dumas' leadership experience includes several terms as a Faculty Senator at UTC. He was also the Chairman of the Graduate Council, which oversees all master's, specialist's, and doctoral programs at UTC, from 2005 to 2007. He has twice been named "Outstanding Computer Science Teacher" at UTC. Dr. Dumas participates in a variety of civic activities and was a Hurricane Katrina relief volunteer.

Dr. and Mrs. Dumas reside in Signal Mountain; they attend Signal Crest United Methodist Church.