

SCHOOL BOARD - DISTRICT 11

BENJAMIN BAEKER



1. Why are you running for this position?

As a parent of a Spring Hill Middle School student, and as a resident of Maury County, I believe the investment, be it through dollars or time or expertise, a community makes in their education system and infrastructure reflects directly on the value the community has on its desire to improve the quality of life for generations to come.

2. What specific experience and qualifications do you have that make you the ideal candidate for this position?

In the healthcare field over the last 20 years, I have held multiple strategic and leadership roles. The companies I have worked for have entrusted me with evaluating and negotiating multi-million dollar vendor contracts, creating and managing to budgets, and most importantly developing leaders and building strong teams.

3. In your opinion, what is the most important role of the Maury County School Board and, if elected, what will be your most important role as an individual board member?

Planning for the future. Maury County is now one of the fastest growing counties in the State. It will be important to appropriately plan for growth from the perspective of technology and infrastructure absolutely. Most importantly though, we must work to retain excellent teachers and become the most enticing county for amazing educators to want to work from all over the country. Personally, I plan to lean on my ability to pull disparate groups together to find common ground, understand varied points of view, and to create consensus on how best to push forward. It will take clear and consistent communication between the Board, District Administration, Principals, Teachers, Staff, Parents, County Commission, and Residents. No one party owns the entire truth, and it will be important to bring all of those necessary pieces together to move future plans forward.

4. What do you see as the top 3 priorities for Maury County Schools and how do you plan to contribute to accomplishing those priorities?

1) Retaining star-level educators: Full review of benefits packages. Create incentive compensation based not only on test score achievement but also on the basis of professionalism and continued growth as educators. Ensuring educators are receiving the level of support and communication from their local administration.

2) Strong financial management: With the passing of TISA funding plan, Maury County is likely to receive a small but meaningful funding boost. It will be important to clearly understand how those dollars are allocated among the district, their intent among the district, and ensuring that those dollars are spent wisely.

3) Maury County Schools needs to advocate better for themselves: During the most recent legislation, a fair amount of local control was removed when it comes to approving/not approving things like charter schools. Combined with a new funding mechanism, a lot of decisions that are made for our schools, could be coming from Nashville. It will be important for us as a Board to align with the superintendent, school administrators, educators, and the County Commission as to the true needs and wants of our system. It is better to self-govern than to have government done

to you. We will need to be clear and closely aligned on our stated objectives and intentions and fearless in our conversations.

5. How do you plan to work collaboratively with the School Board, the Superintendent, and the County Commission to ensure financial stability, student success, and alignment with community expectations?

The work of the School Board is not what happens at the meetings, it is what happens in between those meetings. It will be imperative for the Board to a consistent, clear, and direct line of communication with the Superintendent's office. There needs to be 300% accountability (to one another, from one another, and to the public) regarding progress towards goals and benchmarks, our financial situation, and future planning. The school district is not here to create revenue, and therefore our requested investments need to be viewed in the same vain as other investments in the community be they roads, infrastructure, or other quality of life improvements. On behalf of the School Board though, we need to be clear in our intentions and expectations for those investments by providing measurable goals and outcomes. That being said, we need to make sure ugliness of politics doesn't creep into the important work of our Board and of our District. We must make sure that the future of our students don't become political pawns for individual races.

6. Maury County is one of the fastest growing counties in the state and country. This tremendous growth puts a strain on our school system. How do you plan to provide new schools and improve existing facilities?

Repeating from above, but restated, the Board needs to spend the requisite amount of time studying the growth and relying on expert opinions on those growth patterns, creating a unified plan with associated costs and recommendations, with clearly stated outcomes that makes a yes vote from the Commission inevitable.

7. Understanding that the Maury County Commission is ultimately responsible for providing funding to the board for both operations and school facilities, how do you plan to improve collaboration between the School Board and County Commission to ensure appropriate funding is provided?

First and foremost, I will attest that I will never allow school funding to be used as any bargaining chip when it comes to the political machinations of Maury County. Again, it will be vital for the Board to lay out a clear plan and advertise it to the public – plainly stated with potential contingencies and expected outcomes – build support in the community and require the Commission to stand by their votes either in favor or against the furthering of public education in this county.

8. The financial management of the district has been a point of emphasis for several years. What solutions do you propose to address this issue?

Admittedly, I do not have clear insight into the particulars of the financial management of the district outside of anecdotes, rumors, and news articles. Without having seen the general ledger it is difficult to make concise recommendations in this format. That being said, I am confident that my expertise in highly complex healthcare industries, understanding, evaluating, and managing to those budgets has been a cornerstone of my 20-year career to this point.

9. How do you plan to interact with the community and the schools in your district in order to understand their specific needs and ensure those needs are being addressed?

I have been and will continue to be extremely active on social media (Facebook.com/baekermcsb11). If elected, I will gladly publish my phone and personal email for members of this community to reach out to me directly.

10. What does a successful term look like to you?

This is a great question. First and foremost, continued improvement in all measurable areas of school success (TCAP scores, graduation rates, ACT/SAT scores, etc.). Growth in educator employment through a mixture of retention and recruitment. Improved teacher recognition. Development of a fully-funded and realistic five-year plan for the district.

11. Quality education and a successful school district are top priorities for Economic & Community Development. If elected, how do you plan to partner with the Maury County Chamber & Economic Alliance to improve the Maury County School District?

The short answer, in any way possible. I think the School Board has a lot of opportunities to work outside of itself in building stronger relationships with other area school boards when it comes to flexing muscle in Nashville for its needs, as well as partnering with as many community-based organizations to increase its profile within the community as a true asset and key pillar to our continued growth and improvement in quality of life.

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