



# Public Education Partners

## Greenville County

### Greenville County School Board of Trustees: Area 22 Candidate Questionnaire Responses

Candidates' responses were limited to 150 words per question. Other than edits to meet the 150 word limit, responses are uploaded exactly as provided.

	<b>Lynda Leventis-Wells</b>	<b>Lura Godfrey</b>
<b>Years in School Board Area:</b>	35 years	15 at our current address, but was only recently added to District 22 after the census redistricting this year
<b>Education Background:</b>	Graduated from Wade Hampton High School, BA in Health & Physical Education from the University of S.C. , MED in Guidance & Educational Psychology from the University of Miss. (Ole Miss) and certified Class 1 Law Enforcement Officer from the S.C. Criminal Justice Academy	Dorman High School class of 1992; 1996 B.S. of Design, Clemson University; 1998 Master of Architecture, Washington University
<b>Employment/Occupation:</b>	GCS Board Trustee and serve on several nonprofits	Architect/Owner of LMG Architects, LLC
<b>Campaign website and/or social media page:</b>	<a href="http://www.LyndaForEducation.com">www.LyndaForEducation.com</a>	<a href="http://www.lura4education.com">www.lura4education.com</a> FB & IG- @lura4education
<b>Do you have children? If so, what school(s) do/did they attend?:</b>	Our daughter graduated from JL Mann and BA Degree in Business/Marketing from Coastal Carolina University. Our son graduated from Greenville Senior High	2 kids- Freshman at Greenville High School; 6th Grader at Greenville Middle Academy

	Academy, BA Degree in Business and Accounting from the University of S.C, received his Doctorate in Dental Medicine (DMD) from Augusta University Dental College of Georgia and is currently a Resident in the Orthodontics Program	
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<b>Why do you care about public schools and why are you willing to serve as a member of the Greenville County Schools Board of Trustees?</b>	Public education is at the heart of who I am, and my lifelong passion has been to teach, inspire, prepare, and serve students. I have fulfilled this role in many different capacities during my career as an educator. In each role, I found great fulfillment, a keen sense of purpose, and felt that I was contributing to a brighter future for our schools and community. I strongly believe there is no greater calling than to serve children, and I am thankful that God instilled this desire within my heart many years ago and that it remains today. Serving on our school board has provided me with a pathway where I can continue to serve, advocate, and contribute to the children and citizens of area 22.	First- GRATITUDE. I am so grateful for the experience my boys and our family had at Stone Academy during their elementary school years. The staff treat the kids and each other as family. I want to provide all GCS families an experience at their schools they can be grateful for. Second- we need more parent representation on the school board. As a parent with two kids in GCS, I have firsthand experience of what our kids are facing today in our culture and in our schools and can ensure that parents' voices are heard. Third- Even though the board is a non-partisan entity, the board has been affected by the political climate of our world. I want to keep a listening ear and an open heart to bring rational clarity and kindness to the office. I don't want to be right-I want to do what's right.
<b>Please describe your work and volunteer background and how it prepares you to be a Greenville County Schools Trustee.</b>	My adult life has been committed to public service. I have served my community in many capacities including the following: Executive Director of the Carolinas Institute for Community Policing, School Board Trustee for The Greenville County School District from 11/06 to the present (serving as Secretary, Vice Chairman, and Chairman), President of Crime Stoppers of Greenville County for three	I'm trained as an architect and daily I use collaborative problem-solving. In the design process, there are different opinions and options. I work towards the most effective solution, keeping in mind the needs of the client, the budget, and construction methods. I will apply this same collaborative approach as I work through each issue the board needs to address. My volunteer work with Rebuild Upstate, Habitat

	<p>terms, Vice President of the Jefferson Award Foundation, President of the Parish Council, Chairman of the Greek Festival for St. George Orthodox Cathedral, coached girls' sports at Wade Hampton High School and JL Mann High School, and assisted with the Furman University Women's Basketball Team. I have received numerous honors for my public service including the prestigious Order of the Palmetto Award in 2012. These experiences have prepared me and inspired me. The opportunity to serve Area 22 continues to be an honor and a passion.</p>	<p>for Humanity, and Homes of Hope has taught me how important it is to meet basic needs first before learning can happen. I just completed my term as PTA President at Stone. I have served as the Health and Safety Committee chair, Book Fair chair, and as VP of PTA for Service and Enrichment. In each of these roles, I had to delegate responsibilities and work with many personality types. Working as a team, we created opportunities for the kids to succeed and flourish.</p>
<p><b>What do you consider to be the most important issue for the District and Board of Trustees to focus on in the next four years and why? What role should the Board of Trustees play in addressing it?</b></p>	<p>The most important issue for the GC School Board is to help our students to recover from the academic losses, as well as the emotional impact, of the pandemic. This effort is paramount because a strong community is contingent upon prepared graduates. Not only have our students experienced large deficits in their learning, but there has been an increased incidence in the number of students experiencing anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges. It is the board's responsibility to ensure resources are in place to address these issues. As your board member, I have supported funding the implementation of numerous programs to support the well-being of our students. These programs include summer learning, tutoring, after-school programs, and the addition of intervention specialists in ELA and math, etc. In addition, I supported increased counseling services at our schools and the addition of a site-based mental health therapist at each school location.</p>	<p>We must recruit the BEST teachers, and that includes adding more diversity in our staff. GCS benefits from the wonderful education programs at both Furman and Clemson. Clemson also has the Call Me Mister program to encourage black males to become teachers. We can work with these university programs to encourage these future teachers to come to GCS. Once we've hired the best teachers, we must support and retain them. Even though I don't believe most teachers go into teaching for the pay, teachers deserve salaries that reflect their value! We can also advocate for a better quality of life for our teachers and staff, which includes affordable housing near their schools so that their commute is minimal, and so they are a part of the community in which they work.</p>

<p><b>What do you think is the greatest strength of Greenville County Schools and how would you as a Trustee work to enhance it?</b></p>	<p>As the area 22 school board member for many years, I am honored to have great insight into our district strengths, which I am proud to report are numerous. However, the greatest strength is the strong, unified focus on student success. "Students inspired, supported, and prepared for their next opportunities in life, education, and employment" is not only our vision statement; it is our purpose, our responsibility, our passion, and our honor. My focus will continue to be on student success—delivering high-quality curriculum, instruction, and interventions that meet the needs of each student; recruiting, retaining, and developing exemplary personnel in all positions; providing a safe and healthy environment that promotes learning and respectful relationships; ensuring the efficient use of resources through effective management; and generating support and system effectiveness through partnerships, communications, and recognitions.</p>	<p>We have so many school choice options within our school system- magnet schools, virtual school, the lottery option to attend another school, and our career technical and fine arts programs. I want to ensure that all the kids in our district have access to these programs and options. Because our district is so large, we must ensure that distance or lack of transportation doesn't limit the availability of school choice options for some of our students. One solution is to advocate with our state government to allow smaller shuttles for transporting our kids, thus allowing more eligible drivers that don't need a commercial driving license.</p>
<p><b>From your reading of the <i>Profile of the South Carolina Graduate</i> adopted by the SC State Board of Education and the SC Education Oversight Committee, what is your greatest area of concern in terms of academic achievement in our schools and how would you as a trustee work to address it?</b></p>	<p>My greatest concern is reading proficiency. Reading proficiency by the end of third grade continues to be considered the most reliable indicator of whether a child will graduate from high school. Recognizing that students learn to read in the primary grades and then spend the rest of their lives reading to learn requires that we address challenges to early literacy so that all children can be on track by third grade. I strongly advocate for a focus on early literacy and K-8 reading. I support a balanced literacy teaching model which enables students to see reading and writing modeled, share in reading and writing with the teacher, receive independent coaching, and be</p>	<p>The Profile is a wonderful checklist to start us on a path for a complete graduate, but it doesn't consider that South Carolina consistently ranks as one of the worst public education states in the nation. These goals are achievable, but we need more teachers that are willing to employ different teaching methods like arts integration and project-based learning. We must think creatively to ensure that our kids are getting a well-rounded education that includes relational and problem-solving skills while they are also learning the education standards. We also need our state to fully fund all areas of public education that support this Profile checklist, which will mean some schools will need more</p>

	<p>engaged in word study. Other efforts include encouraging parents to read to their children, ensuring our preschool programs are high-quality, reducing absences, and providing the interventions that are needed to get students "on track" to read proficiently.</p>	<p>funding than others to have the support staff needed to ensure every child's success.</p>
<p><b>“Critical thinking and problem solving” and “collaboration and teamwork” are among the “World Class Skills” called for in the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate. How best can our educators instill these abilities in their students, and how should the District support them?</b></p>	<p>Today, the basic skills of reading, writing, and math are no longer enough. Children need to be able to think critically and work collaboratively if they are going to be successful in today's complex world. This requires that teachers move their questioning beyond rote memorization and instead ask open-ended questions (how? and why?)--providing students with a chance to apply what they have learned and build on prior knowledge. This also allows students to problem solve and think on their feet. Moreover, when students work in teams to solve problems it exposes them to the thought processes of their classmates, further expanding their thinking and increasing their ability to formulate creative solutions. Our district can support this effort by providing quality professional development for teachers and by ensuring teacher observations include these important components. Our best opportunity for a brighter future in SC, is equipping students with these essential skills.</p>	<p>Having experienced arts integration first-hand at Stone Academy, I am partial to this method of learning and teaching because it levels the playing field in the classroom. Kids come from many different backgrounds, home lives, socio-economic situations and when you have all kids dancing, acting, drawing, creating together, it removes the inhibitions many kids have about fitting in or standing out. It also allows the kids to learn the subject matter in many different ways- collaboratively, with movement, with sound, or visually. Our schools are filled with many different types of learners and arts integration meets each student with their best method for learning. Working together, despite differences, in the classroom gives the kids the skills they need to work collaboratively later in life.</p>
<p><b>What do you consider the most important factors in building a strong collaborative relationship between Greenville County Schools Administration and the Board of Trustees?</b></p>	<p>Developing a productive partnership between the board and administration requires that we draw on and respect the abilities of everyone involved. Everyone brings something unique to the table, whether it be professional training and experience, personal knowledge,</p>	<p>We need to trust and respect each other and our varieties of backgrounds on the Board. We also need to acknowledge the experience and knowledge in our administration. The administration also needs to encourage the Trustees to work directly with their schools,</p>

	<p>or a deep understanding of the public's view of the educational process. These combined strengths are utilized most effectively when roles and expectations are clearly defined. The board should adopt policies that specify what it expects from the administration and vice versa. It is only when the administration and the board work together to model a shared commitment to higher standards, an ability to discuss topics professionally, and the belief that continuous improvement is necessary for students to succeed that a district can make noteworthy progress.</p>	<p>(including its teachers, staff, students, and parents) so they can hear about their successes and needs, and then bring that information back to the administration. Only with specific and targeted fact-gathering can we then work together to get the best outcome for all our students in their respective schools.</p>
<p><b>Teacher pay is always a top concern in recruiting and retaining quality teachers. This is reflected in Greenville County Schools' priority of keeping teacher salaries at or among the highest in the State. So other than this issue, what are the biggest challenges facing teachers today? What forms of support should the District provide for teachers facing these challenges?</b></p>	<p>Today's teachers face many challenges. Being aware of those challenges and seeking teacher input is a first step in providing support. These challenges include, but are not limited to the following: finding the time needed to keep up with daily administrative tasks (writing lesson plans, creating assessments, grading papers, analyzing student data, etc.) while balancing personal time with their own families; differentiating and personalizing learning so that all students can succeed at the highest levels; improving learning outcomes; inspiring students to be self-motivated learners; getting students to complete assignments; staying abreast of changing technology; and fostering parental involvement. I believe providing teachers with a daily planning period (free from the distraction of students) is a minimum expectation. In addition, it is critical that we hear their voices. Trustees should ensure teachers are surveyed regularly to determine needs, concerns, morale, etc., and action should be taken to address problem areas.</p>	<p>Teachers and staff need mental and emotional support right now, especially after the pandemic, coping with the constant fear of school safety, and balancing curriculum with testing requirements. The teachers see the kids struggling with many burdens. Then the teachers carry that weight, too. We must expand mental health resources for all the staff in the schools. Although I think of teachers as superheroes, they are human and they need to be fully supported, as they support our kids. I have a friend that left teaching because the amount of testing required of the teachers is affecting their ability to teach all the subject matter. The testing puts too much emphasis on numbers showing success, rather than looking at the whole child. The board needs to work internally to determine which testing is truly necessary, as well as advocate at the state and national level to limit testing.</p>

<p><b>What does school safety mean to you, and how would you prioritize investment to keep students and staff most safe within our school buildings?</b></p>	<p>The safety of our students is paramount. As your board member, I would prioritize investments by continually building on safety measures currently in place. Specifically, I am supportive of increasing the number of metal/weapons detection systems in our schools, as well as placing a full-time resource officer at each site location. Additional goals include increasing the use of specialized teams to conduct threat and risk assessments at each location and to define proper procedures based on the findings, increased reviews of emergency protocol procedures at the school level, continually updating electronic safety equipment (e.g., video surveillance, burglar alarms, and access control systems, and to continue to build on our "See Something, Say Something" program/protocol which encourages students to report concerns to a trusted adult or online. Finally, I would ensure that all policies that support the safety and well-being of our students are implemented with fidelity.</p>	<p>I support current GCS safety measures such as school resource officers, and the weapons detection system rotating through the district. However, our kids are perceptive, and I believe they are the first line of safety for a friend who may be carrying a heavy burden. If a student can recognize a need or concern, for a friend or themselves, and share it with a trusted adult, this is the most important first step to keeping our schools safe. This builds community and trust, and these relational skills will serve our kids as students and citizens as they enter the real world. We need to continue to provide our kids with mental health support by adding more school counselors, especially at the elementary level, so that the ratio of counselors to students continues to go down. Kids need to know the counselors are there and available to them!</p>
<p><b>What would be your priority(ies) as a board member to ensure that students with higher needs receive appropriate support to reach their highest levels of achievement?</b></p>	<p>Every student deserves an excellent education and the opportunities it provides, and the board should ensure the following practices are in place to support all learners, including our most at-risk students: enhanced focus on early literacy and K-8 reading, early intervention programs in reading and math, more hands-on learning, reduced class sizes, excellent teachers and principals, supports for mental health, and equitable opportunities across multiple pathways for students (whether preparing for four-year college or seeking career and technical expertise). In addition, I strongly support the addition of K-4</p>	<p>Equity isn't equal. It means some schools need more resources to allow every child the best chance of success in school and life. As a board, we need to acknowledge that many of our schools in our large and varied district are in areas with less employment and lower incomes. All the trustees need to work together to determine the extra resources these schools require to be successful, not just the trustees assigned to those schools. We also have schools with huge support systems backing them up because of family involvement and resources. I'd like to investigate how we can create an adoption system between schools to</p>

	<p>programs in the communities where they are most needed. As an educator, I understand that early intervention is key to getting students "on track" to be successful in school. Finally, it is essential that we build relationships and partnerships with community agencies and service providers so that we can offer an additional layer of support and direction to families in need.</p>	<p>share resources, mentors, programs, and supplies. When each school is whole and successful, our district is also whole and successful.</p>
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