

# KINGS MOUNTAIN HERALD CANDIDATE FORUM

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## BLANTON, cont.

the art board meeting room. The current school board has not properly supervised the use, or in many incidents, misuse of the schools' credit card system. The credit card system has been misused on numerous occasions. Teachers are not able to teach because they are required to attend so many meetings and having to take extra work home to complete.

### 4. Do you now or have you had children in the school system?

I have four grandchildren currently in the Cleveland County School System. One of my children graduated Cleveland County Schools and my other three graduated from the Gaston County Schools.

## Kathy Falls

I am Kathy Falls, age 47. I have been married to my husband Jeff for 28 years. We both graduated from Kings Mountain High School in 1984. We have three sons; Jordan, 19, a 2012 graduate of Kings Mountain High School and currently a sophomore at Campbell University. Brandon, 16, is a junior at Kings Mountain High School and Zachary, 12, is a 7th grader at the Kings Mountain Intermediate School.

Some things I enjoy are spending time with my family, walking, watching college football, traveling and shopping. I have enjoyed representing Cleveland County on the school board. I have devoted the past four years to serving our students, teachers, and staff. I hope you will vote for Kathy Falls on November 5th so that I can continue to make a difference on the Board of Education in Cleveland County.



1. Why are you running for the school board?

I am running for school board because I want to be a voice for the 15,191 children and their parents that attend Cleveland County Schools. I also want to be a voice for the 2,354 employees that work for our school system. I have been encouraged to run for school board by parents and teachers that feel they need someone that they can discuss problems with confidentially. As a parent of two current students, I feel that I am extremely aware of the problems that our students, parents, teachers, and staff face every day. I feel strongly that our school board needs a 'Mama' on the Board of Education. It is my goal to address and work with all school board members to find solutions to improve our school environment for the betterment of all students and staff in Cleveland County Schools.

### 2. What are the big issues the school board will face in the next few years?

Keeping quality teachers in our classrooms is by far one of the biggest problems in our schools today. North Carolina rankings 46th in teacher pay. Legislative budget cuts have created many issues for our students, teachers, and our assistants. Since 2008, our teachers have received only one pay increase from the state level. That increase occurred in 2012-2013 when the state approved an average increase for all state employees of 1.2%. The current school board rewarded teachers with a 10% salary increase in local supplement in the 2012-2013. While not near

enough, we wanted our teachers to know they are important in Cleveland County. Our legislator's also cut teacher assistants in Cleveland County Schools over one million dollars. Other issues that we must address are new classroom wings in some of our oldest schools and additional classroom wings to replace mobile units in overcrowded schools.

### 3. What are we doing right in the Cleveland County Schools? What are we doing wrong?

What we are doing right: Cleveland County Schools are offering a variety of Advance Placement classes to challenge our students and better prepare them for college. We have raised the graduation rate to 83.3%, which is the highest it has ever been in Cleveland County Schools. As a school system we have closed the achievement gap. While in the Nation there is still work to be done, our teachers, principals, staff, and parents have partnered together with the community to achieve these accomplishments.

What are we doing wrong? Cleveland County Schools must continue to work to prepare our students to be globally competitive. Our students and teachers need to have one-on-one lap-top initiative to help them become better prepared. We must provide our teachers with all the necessary tools to help our students be successful. We must also improve our facilities to help equip all of students and teachers with the best learning and working environment possible.

State legislators eliminated career status of teachers in 2013. Teachers can only be offered 1, 2 or 4-year contracts based on experience, effectiveness and proficiency. Only 25% of our teachers can be offered four-year contracts.

We need to make sure our school board is balanced with some members that do not have family employed by our school system to ensure that every teacher will have a fair chance at the four-year contract and the \$5,000 bonus that the state is offering to a very select group of teachers. If elected, I promise to make sure this process is fair to all teachers.

### 4. Do you now or have you had children in the school system?

Yes, I currently have two children in our school system. Brandon is in the 11th grade at Mountain High School. Zachary is a 7th grader at the Kings Mountain Intermediate School and my oldest Jordan, 19, graduated from Kings Mountain High School in 2012. He current attends Campbell University as a sophomore.

### 5. Do you have a spouse who is employed by the school system?

Neither my husband nor any other relative have ever been employed by Cleveland County School.

## Phillip Glover



1. Why are you running for the school board?

I am motivated to remain a member of the Board of Education. My two children, who are currently in Cleveland County Schools, are my biggest motivation. I want to make sure that they, and every other student in our schools, have a quality education in a safe, orderly, and caring environment.

Also, being married to a teacher encourages me to en-

sure faculty and staff have a voice and the support they need to educate our young people. During our present challenging legislative changes, it is more important than ever to support and lift up our public school system. It motivates me now, more than ever, to continue a strong, positive attitude and to work hard as a team for Cleveland County Schools.

### 2. What are the big issues the school board will face in the next few years?

The biggest issues our schools are facing are budget concerns and keeping teacher and teacher assistant positions. The legislators have made it difficult to retain our faculty and staff, therefore we need to continue to closely monitor our budget so we will be able to provide quality education for every student in the Cleveland County School System.

### 3. What are we doing right in the Cleveland County Schools? What are we doing wrong?

We are currently doing many things that are right in Cleveland County Schools. We have increased our graduation rate for the fourth consecutive year to 83.3%, which is above the state average.

We have been able to start our fifth high school, which is the Early College High School. Not only does this give students a high school diploma, but it also gives them a two-year degree.

Through parent and community involvement outreach efforts, we are strengthening our partnership. These are just a few of the positive things happening in Cleveland County Schools.

We are always striving to improve, and we have just been presented our Strategic Plan Recommendations to strengthen Cleveland County Schools.

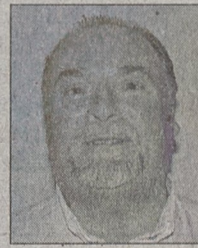
### 4. Do you now or have you had children in the school system?

I have two children, a son and a daughter, who are students in our school system.

### 5. Do you have a spouse who is employed by the school system?

My wife teaches 3rd grade for Cleveland County Schools.

## Jeff Gregory



1. Why are you running for the school board?

I believe I can make a big and positive difference in the education and lives of our children. I have the administrative background to ensure the people's money is spent appropriately, and where it is needed most. It is imperative that the board be good stewards of the people's money. I will be that good steward.

We are at a crossroads in education in Cleveland County and I will make sure we take the most beneficial and effective path for all. It is of the utmost importance that our children have a safe and receptive place to be educated. This will be a high priority, as well as making sure parental rights are adhered to. Many issues such as common core and misuse of funds are being ignored. I will not allow such issues to continue to be ignored.

It is important that we have a member who will listen to the people and not look down on them. I am committed to be that member.

### 2. What are the big issues the school board will face in the next few years?

Common core and the education of the students are big issues for the next few years. Budget restraints will also be a huge fiscal responsibility concern. We will need board members who are willing to put the best interest of all first, not just family and friends.

Bullying, drugs and harassment in the school system among students must be addressed. Teachers who are frustrated and feel they are not being heard is a great concern that must not be ignored. The closing of community schools and spending millions of dollars for large schools have a negative effect on schools as well as its local community.

Many local school communities feel that they are being abandoned, and have lost communication, and the support of its administration. The abuse of funds must be addressed before the people of Cleveland County lose all faith and respect in our school administrators and the Cleveland County School Board of Education.

### 3. What are we doing right in the Cleveland County Schools? What are we doing wrong?

What are we doing right: We are giving all Cleveland County students an opportunity to receive a free education, paid for by Cleveland County taxpayers. We are the largest employer in Cleveland County. We provide hundreds of Cleveland County residents employment to help support their family's needs.

Another wonderful thing that we are doing right is giving students after school activities and opportunities through sports. Sports are an excellent, safe and enjoyable activity for students, parents, teachers and all taxpayers.

What are we doing wrong: We are not addressing underlying issues such as common core and teacher's concerns.

As I speak to parents and teachers in Cleveland County, many say that they see no need to speak out. They have learned that if they speak out they will get little or no response. Even worse, they will be retaliated against and/or denied promotion.

We are not being fiscally responsible to the people. Issues such as abuse of funds and spending millions of dollars to renovate schools closed, because they are no longer usable must stop. Taking schools out of the local communities is not a good way to unite parents and teachers. It is a way of dismantling local communities. It only serves to break down communication between the students, parents, teachers and administration.

Going along with programs sent down by bureaucrats must be addressed. Unacceptable programs, such as common core must be reevaluated by legislators. The people of Cleveland County must be assured that the superintendent answers to the Cleveland County School Board, and that the Cleveland County School Board answers to the people. We must take our heads out of the sand and address each and every issue brought before the board.

### 4. Do you now or have you had children in the school system?

Yes, both of our children attended Cleveland County schools. My wife, and myself are former PTO presidents of Cleveland County.

### 5. Do you have a spouse who is employed by the school system?

I do not have a spouse that is employed by the school system.

However, it seems that some people may want to serve on the Cleveland County School Board because they do have family and friends employed by the school system. I do not believe that is a good reason to serve on the board. It only appears to be self serving. I want to serve on the board solely to support and help my Cleveland County neighbors as God has commissioned us to do. I have no reason to serve on the Cleveland County Board of Education other than to help the parents, teachers, students and the good people of Cleveland County.

## Darius Griffin



1. Why are you running for the school board?

I care about the Cleveland County School System and community. I also owe a great debt of gratitude to the public education system and Cleveland County community. Therefore, I stand committed to serving the people of Cleveland County to ensure our school system is equipped to prepare all students for graduation, careers, college and citizenship.

As you may know, our school system is in the middle of a transition. Students, parents, school, teachers, administrators, support staff, and elected officials have to positively communicate, collaborate and stay committed to establish workable solutions. For that reason, I feel that I must continue to look forward and offer the voters of Cleveland County a sensible strategic leadership choice.

My plan: 1. Build and support relationships between schools and community programs.  
2. Collaboratively work with board members to align school board goals with the Cleveland County Schools and community goals.

3. Contribute to strategic evidence-based policies that will establish a safe environment where all students graduate and are career, college and citizenship ready.

I am enthusiastic about running for the board.

### 2. What are the big issues the school board will face in the next few years?

- Implementing new strategic plan
- Managing and motivating teachers and support staff
- Alternative schools such as charter and private schools
- Implementing common core standards
- Budget - funding for pay raises and facilities improvement

### 3. What are we doing right in the Cleveland County Schools? What are we doing wrong?

- What we are doing right:
- Creating a strategic plan
  - Lowering the dropout rate
  - Increasing the graduation rate

What are we doing wrong?

- Implementing and tracking progress on strategic plan
- Building parental and community partnerships
- Ensuring accountability at all levels