

WCSB Candidate Questionnaire

Thank you for taking the time to share information about yourself, so we can share with the community. Your participation is a great signal that you believe in transparency and will serve with a willing and open mindset - we will post your answers 100% as you wrote them with no editing or associated commentary.

Please submit no later than END OF DAY 3/4/2022

Email *

kennethmchilton@yahoo.com

Name *

Kenneth Chilton

District

8

How long have you lived in Williamson County? *

9 years

Employer / Occupation *

Professor

Please select all that apply: *

- My kid(s) currently attend a WCS school (2021-22)
- My kid(s) currently attend a FSSD school (2021-22)
- My kid(s) graduated from WCS
- My kids are not yet school age but will attend WCS or FSSD
- My kid(s) attends private school
- My kid(s) is homeschooled
- I have grandchildren enrolled in WCS (2021-22)

Which FSSD/WCS schools do your children attend? (Write N/A if not applicable) *

Grassland Middle School

What is or has been your involvement with Williamson County Schools to date? (e.g. PTO, volunteering, etc.) *

None

Please list any professional or personal organizations you're currently or have recently (last 3 years) been involved with, including where you have a Board of Directors seat, sit on a committee, volunteer for, or regularly attend meetings *

NA

What compelled you to run for this position? *

I never thought about running for public office until the last 6-months. I have been extremely pleased with the quality of my son's experience in WCS and assumed that I didn't need to get involved. I was shocked by the school board meeting in August 2021 that garnered national media attention. The anger and vitriol witnessed at that meeting motivated me to delve deeper into the issues related to Williamson County Public schools. We can do better than that.

As a data analyst, school performance in Williamson County is outstanding. Taxpayers in almost any other district in the United States would be thrilled to achieve at the level of WCS. Yet, opponents of public education seem committed to gutting it.

WCS drives property values and increases equity for all Williamson County residents. It produced over 70 National Merit Finalists in 2021. The average ACT score for WCS students is 26. I want to conserve a high functioning school district. I want to support teachers, staff members, and families who make WCS one of the best districts in the country. I want my son to thrive in a district driven by excellence.

What do you believe is the most important quality or characteristic for a Williamson County School Board member to possess and exhibit? *

The Tennessee School Board Association summarizes the role of the school board as such: "The School Board DOES NOT Run the Schools ... It sees that they are run well." I interpret that to mean school board members should not be activists who try to impose their own personal beliefs on WCS. Board members need to be motivated by a genuine desire to serve the community and enhance student performance, teacher morale, and fiscal management. These duties require patience, empathy, and the ability to remain focused on long term strategic goals.

The role of school board member has another critical duty: constituent service. I will be responsive to constituents who have concerns. Local democracy functions best when elected officials listen to and work with community members.

What are your thoughts on the School Board races being partisan this year due to the new state legislature that passed in late 2020?

Academic and administrative excellence is not a partisan issue. I've worked with numerous nonprofit organizations over the years and never have I encountered a board member who wants to run the organization like a "Republican" or "Democrat." Parents I've talked with are laser-focused on their child's growth and their school's capacity to deliver high quality results. We have parent volunteers serving lunches to our students. We have shortages of bus drivers and other personnel. These issues affect families, not the letter printed beside the name of a school board candidate.

What, if any, involvement have you had in local or state politics before running for School Board? *

I have not had any involvement in local or state politics prior to this experience. I have zero desire to use the school board as a stepping stone for future political aspirations. As an Independent, I have the freedom to act without political pressure from a party apparatus. My views and votes will result from careful study and analysis, not from toeing the proverbial party line.

Have you ever spoken at public comment during a School Board meeting? If yes, please provide details on the topic.

No, I have never spoken at public comment during a School Board meeting.

If you had to describe a School Board member's role in 1-2 sentences, what would it be? *

We are incredibly fortunate in Williamson County. WCS provides outstanding value to parents, home owners, and taxpayers. My role is to be a good steward of that resource. Granted, improvements can and should be made, but I'm a believer in incremental change. We are smart enough in Williamson County to build an even better WCS, but we can't do that through anger and an unwillingness to compromise.

How will you communicate with your constituents if elected? Please share links to your Facebook page, Twitter handle, and/or campaign website: *

I will use Facebook, Twitter, and other electronic resources to communicate with constituents. They are currently in the development phase and I will share them when finished. However, I believe the 8th District is small enough to support direct dialogue. I want to host community feedback events with parents at community centers and the local coffee shop. We might not always agree on all issues, but I truly believe active listening and outreach can tamp down some of the political discord we've witnessed over the last several years. We need to relate to one another as individuals, not tribe members.

What are top 3 most pressing issues facing the School Board at this moment? *

The buzzword in WCS at the moment is "transparency." I believe the school board can do a better job of raising awareness around transparency. At present, policies are in place for parents who want to limit access to books in the library. Parents can contact teachers and substitute a book for an assigned book. As a parent, I have instant access to every reading, assignment, grade, PowerPoint, and communication my child has with his teacher. It's all available through Schoology and Skyward. Parents have never been so empowered. We need to raise awareness and do a better job of informing the public about these issues.

Related to transparency is "parental rights." We need to be responsive to parents but the relationship needs to be reciprocal. Most parents have not been trained in curricular design, pedagogy, psychometrics, or other specialized skills used by educators to improve and measure student success. I have an undergraduate degree in Economics but that doesn't qualify me to design and implement Federal Reserve policy. We also need to balance the rights of Parent A with the rights of Parent B. My gauge will focus on the "greater good" of all students when making decisions, not the whims of an animated subset of parents.

The third issue is vision. School board members have to craft a vision for the future while managing the exigencies of the present. Williamson County is experiencing major growing pains. We experience them daily through traffic congestion, rising housing costs, and other infrastructure pressures. The population of Williamson County has doubled since 2000—rising from 126,000 to 250,000. The Williamson County Chamber of Commerce projects total population could exceed 536,000 by 2040 (https://www.williamsonchamber.com/wp-content/uploads/WilliamsonInc_Trends2018_Web-1.pdf). Managing this growth is a challenge for all elected officials in Williamson County. For school board members, the challenge is to meet the demands population growth will place on school site decisions, teacher & staff recruitment and retention, and school finance. We must develop plans and policies to meet future needs while maintaining low taxes and academic excellence.

If an incumbent, what are you most proud of during your service as a School Board member?

NA

Do you believe WCS teachers are paid enough?

Yes

No

Do you believe WCS schools are adequately funded for their operational and capital needs?

Yes

No

What do voters need to know about you that we haven't already asked when deciding who to support and vote for as their representative? *

I am a first generation college graduate who attended public schools in Louisville, KY. Without excellent teachers and a community that supported public education, my life would likely be much different. I chose to live in Williamson County because of WCS. Every morning my child hops out of the car and enters his school, I'm confident that he will learn in a safe environment. That peace of mind is priceless, but we take it for granted. I will work with board members, not against them. The duties of a school board member as enumerated by the Tennessee School Board Association are limited in scope. My goal will be to stay within those lines when conducting board business. In a nutshell, my goal is to make School Boards boring again.

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