



League of Women Voters  
of Plano/Collin County  
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# Voters Guide

## May 8, 2010, Local Elections McKinney ISD

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Early voting – April 26–May 4, 2010

Election day – Polls open 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

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This Voters Guide is published by the League of Women Voters of Plano/Collin County to help citizens prepare to cast an informed vote. The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan organization, encourages informed and active participation in government. The League does not support or oppose any political party or candidate.

This guide includes contested races in which two or more candidates are running. All candidates for the respective offices were invited to participate. If a candidate did not respond by the deadline, “No response from the candidate” is printed. Responses were limited to 100 words and truncated with /// after the 100<sup>th</sup> word. The candidates appear in alphabetical order.

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### **Candidates for McKinney ISD Board of Trustees, Place 3**

*3 year term, elected within Place 3 geographical area. Responsible for school district priorities and policies.*

#### **Kathi Livezey**

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1. Please describe the training and experience that qualify you for this office.

With 30 years of experience in McKinney ISD and as a McKinney native and former MISD parent, I feel that I have a unique perspective and range of knowledge that qualifies me for this office. I have classroom experience at both the elementary and secondary level, knowledge of the everyday operation of a school, hands-on experience with instructional technology, and an understanding of curriculum and learning resources. As a parent and employee I've experienced the challenges and changes that are inherent in a growing district, and as a life-long resident I know and respect the community.

2. How should the school district weather the current financial downturn: reduced services or personnel, increased fees, delayed construction, other measures?

Before cutting services, programs, or personnel, campuses and administration should analyze general fund expenditures and budget only for bare essentials. The district should determine the shortage and if manageable plan for additional revenue needed by promoting energy saving strategies, conservation of resources, and aggressively seeking grants. Staff could be shared across the district through the use of teleconference equipment.

3. What is the best way to reward good teachers? Do you think that the state's merit pay plan for teachers with matching local fund requirements is an effective use of the school district's funds?

The best way to reward teachers is to keep salaries competitive and to provide a positive collaborative working environment. To foster this environment, teachers need ample planning time and frequent recognition for a job well done from the community and school and district level administrators. Principals and administrators should rely on and utilize the expertise of staff.

I am not in favor of merit pay; designing a merit pay system with standards that are fair for all teachers is close to impossible. Merit pay does not foster an atmosphere of cooperation and teamwork among a campus staff.

4. How should this district prepare students for success whether they are college-bound or not?

Besides providing AP, GT, college prep, and Career and Technology courses, the district should ensure all courses promote verbal and written communication, cultural awareness, and information literacy skills. Through promoting participation in extra-curricular activities students develop leadership skills, ability to work with a team, and improved self-esteem. Character education, environmental responsibility, citizenship, and community volunteer opportunities should be incorporated K-12.

5. What should the school district do to reduce the dropout rate?

Effective anti-dropout programs have school/community partnerships, alternative educational opportunities, career and technology programs, and family participation. I feel MISD should continue partnering with community agencies; the district should expand its career and technology programs and promote internships with local businesses; MISD should continue to operate the Linc Center and Serenity High as educational alternatives for those students who are struggling. Mentors that are consistent and readily available should be assigned to provide extra help and encouragement. MISD should support parent/student learning opportunities in the form of workshops or individual counseling to reiterate the value of education and completing high school.

6. What should the school district do to address the problem of obesity in children?

More than 30 percent of Texas children are considered to be overweight or obese. Texas has added extra nutritional guidelines for foodservice, but schools must also encourage healthy eating habits, promote physical activity, and provide nutritional education and cooking classes to both students and parents. Some strategies that might help students select more wisely at the secondary level, where there is a wide variety of food choices, is to provide nutrition labels at the point of selection and healthier foods like salads and fruits at lower prices than burgers and fries.

7. What are the most important issues you think will come before the school district in the next three years? What are your views on these issues?

1. School finances – With costs increasing faster than revenue, how long can MISD continue to offer the current programs and services and not cut personnel? District leaders need to collaborate and partner with the city and economic development entities to attract non-residential taxable property.

2. Redistricting – I feel the district needs to maximize use of all high school facilities, maintain socio-economic balance, and keep neighborhood elementary schools.

3. Retaining quality teachers – The staff is the key to a successful district. A desirable professional environment must be maintained to attract and retain the best teachers and staff possible.

### **Victor Manuel**

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1. Please describe the training and experience that qualify you for this office.

I am an experienced college professor, former president of the McKinney GT Parent's group, and former VP of the MNHS Band Boosters. I've served on the committees to search for a new Superintendent, create a Strategic Plan for MISD, and the 2010 Bond Planning Team. Three of my siblings and my mother are currently teachers.

I not only have sizeable experience in the field and the district, I constantly have personal input from professionals in the field. With an International Business degree and multiple IT Industry certifications, I am readily prepared to provide an updated, insightful viewpoint to MISD.

2. How should the school district weather the current financial downturn: reduced services or personnel, increased fees, delayed construction, other measures?

The economic downturn has also decreased population growth. This means we have the opportunity to delay non-vital construction, examine cost-cutting measures, and set in place a bond election. These measures will ensure that we retain our experienced personnel while doing our best to service the children of our community.

3. What is the best way to reward good teachers? Do you think that the state's merit pay plan for teachers with matching local fund requirements is an effective use of the school district's funds?

The state has chipped away at funding for school districts over the last twenty years, forcing local taxpayers to support school budgets. In 1996, the average Texan paid 63% of our school's budget. In 2000, the State increased that to 73%. Today it is over 82% and sure to rise.

This means that the state has more sway when they dole out financial support for schools, because every dollar they give has more of an effect. The requirement is not an effective use of our already limited budget, however we have precious few choices available to retain quality employees.

4. How should this district prepare students for success whether they are college-bound or not?

The main responsibility of MISD is to provide the best possible learning environment for all students while being good stewards of taxpayer dollars. In this regard, we have to ensure that students who are not college-bound are able to access trade-based courses so they can be prepared to join the workforce as soon as they leave high school.

Technical classes can not only bridge that educational gap, they can also give college-bound students a taste of possible job paths. And they're attractive for local companies who may support the district directly in order to help create a smarter workforce.

5. What should the school district do to reduce the dropout rate?

According to Kepler Reports, children who drop out of school are more likely to be unemployed, in prison, and receive government aid. Their main reasons for dropping are poor preparation for high school and lack of motivation.

We have to get under the skin of today's students and recognize what motivates them to succeed not only in school, but in Life itself. By enabling kids to care about school and be prepared for success, we will be saving their lives and our own pocketbooks.

6. What should the school district do to address the problem of obesity in children?

We are not preparing children to be active adults when a school's idea of recess is walking around the park in a circle for thirty minutes. Children need to be given time to engage in active play in order to appreciate the benefits of an active lifestyle. Talking the talk about the benefits of health only go so far, if we do not also walk the walk.

7. What are the most important issues you think will come before the school district in the next three years? What are your views on these issues?

The most important issues that we will face are that of implementing the new Strategic Plan for MISD; coordinating and setting up a Bond Election to finance our district's expansion; and accommodating the growing student population with a dwindling financial tax base.

I favor using our contacts with the community to help the Strategic Plan move forward; restoring the Bond Committee to begin steering an election; and taking a sharp eye towards delaying non-vital projects to save money in the immediate future.

## **Candidates for McKinney ISD Board of Trustees, Place 6 At Large**

*3 year term, elected at large. Responsible for school district priorities and policies.*

### **Wade Johnson (Incumbent)**

Unopposed

## **Candidates for McKinney ISD Board of Trustees, Place 7 At Large**

*3 year term, elected at large. Responsible for school district priorities and policies.*

### **Bobby Amick**

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972.547.1191

1. Please describe the training and experience that qualify you for this office.

My educational background, work experience, family and personal experiences have equipped me to serve McKinney ISD on Place 7 of the Board of Trustees. I have a Bachelors Degree in Industrial Engineering from Northwestern University and a Juris Doctor, *magna cum laude* from Baylor Law School. My three children attend elementary, middle and high school here, and my wife is employed by MISD. I have personally served as a substitute teacher at McKinney middle and high schools, and I am a REACH mentor involved in the life of an elementary student at a Title 1 school in the district.

2. How should the school district weather the current financial downturn: reduced services or personnel, increased fees, delayed construction, other measures?

The current board has done a nice job keeping an eye on expenditures while at the same time not allowing the economy to dictate the type of education the district provides to its students. Indeed, the school district, despite the temporarily slowed economy has managed to build and equip new schools, hire additional, highly-qualified teachers, and expand curriculum without creating financial problems whose only recourse is additional taxes or drastic cuts. The best way to weather the economic issues is to maintain our current focus and form strategic partnerships, which will permit economies of scale and affordability for new growth.

3. What is the best way to reward good teachers? Do you think that the state's merit pay plan for teachers with matching local fund requirements is an effective use of the school district's funds?

Part of the equation for rewarding our teachers is a competitive pay structure and benefits package that rewards both longevity and achievement. Also included in such rewards would be improved resources for teaching, better working conditions, and commitment to worthwhile continuing education—all of which will help our district in not only attracting the best teachers, but also retaining the best. As to the state system, I applaud Austin's desire to provide more to our teachers. I prefer, however, that these funds would be given to the district without the government strings attached.

4. How should this district prepare students for success whether they are college-bound or not?

Whether college-bound or not, students deserve to have an education made available that will not limit what they hope to achieve with their lives. Part of this educational plan is determined by the state; i.e., the minimum requirements for graduation. These minimum requirements provide a foundation of a broad-based education. However, such requirements do not address the needs of some students who do not intend to continue their education at a college or university. Accordingly, the district should (and does) provide career counseling as well as elective courses that prepare students to enter technical careers upon graduation.

5. What should the school district do to reduce the dropout rate?

Our district has an impressive record of keeping students in school. Indeed, AEIS indicates that our dropout rate is approximately 1.3%, which is less than half the dropout rate of the state as a whole. Obviously, the district aspires to a 100% graduation rate, and any dropping out represents an incredible waste. I believe that the dropout rate can be reduced further through community partnerships involving high school students and a vibrant mentorship program beginning in elementary school. Such programs, I believe, will not only reduce dropouts, but will also have a profound collateral effect of closing the achievement gap.

6. What should the school district do to address the problem of obesity in children?

Experts agree that obesity is an increasing problem for our students. Obesity is best addressed by diet, exercise, and education. First, the district should require its food service vendors within our schools to provide a balanced nutritional menu. Second, the school district should ensure that its physical education programs remain relevant and rigorous. Third, the district should ensure that its health courses address the importance of a healthy diet and exercise. Lastly, as with any issue with our students, the district should ensure that lines of communication between parents and campus health professionals remain open regarding particular student health concerns.

7. What are the most important issues you think will come before the school district in the next three years? What are your views on these issues?

The most important issues are student achievement, teacher recruitment and retention, and fiscal responsibility. In order to address these issues, I intend to direct my efforts at supporting the district's strategic plan and each campus' action plan in a fiscally responsible way. Specifically, I will push for the use and expansion of the programs for gifted students (such as AP, dual credit and IB), as well as employment of community partnerships and mentorship initiatives to address the needs of at-risk students. In addition, I will highlight investments in our teachers through teacher training and inter-campus mentoring.

## **Cindy Evans**

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1. Please describe the training and experience that qualify you for this office.

I am passionate about serving this community and have been active with the MISD, City of McKinney and community for the past eight years. I have served on four MISD and City bond committees, MISD's Long-Range Planning Committee, two rezoning committees, the Superintendent's Search Committee, McKinneyCAN (a nine-month program to educate community leaders about MISD) and volunteered at my son's campuses. I am in Leadership McKinney (2009-2010), worked as Communications Manager for the McKinney Education Foundation, and am active at Stonebridge United Methodist Church, currently as a parent leader of the Confirmation class.

2. How should the school district weather the current financial downturn: reduced services or personnel, increased fees, delayed construction, other measures?

There is no question this is a time for conservative stewardship of the District's financial resources. While the state's formula for funding schools has shielded the MISD's operating budget, it has impacted its ability to issue debt to fund new facilities and technology. This may result in the delay of new facilities, even though enrollment continues to climb. I would not favor cuts that impact the quality of education in MISD. It is the foundation of this community. Families, new customers and new businesses move here because of our school system, and we must protect it during difficult financial times.

3. What is the best way to reward good teachers? Do you think that the state's merit pay plan for teachers with matching local fund requirements is an effective use of the school district's funds?

I don't believe it is practical to pay teachers based on student performance. Education isn't like manufacturing a product where the "raw materials" are all the same. Children have a wide range of abilities and challenges. Administrators need to place each student with the best teacher for that student, not try to "equalize" the classes so each class achieves evenly. A teacher may excel at teaching gifted, bilingual, and dyslexic or ADHD students. Some of the best teachers thrive teaching students with the most challenges. Moreover, the state's merit pay plan did not produce the desired improvement in student achievement.

4. How should this district prepare students for success whether they are college-bound or not?

Today's kindergarteners will be in the workforce through 2070. They will bring about extraordinary advances in science, technology, medicine and engineering throughout their careers. They need a higher level of education to compete in an increasingly technology driven, global economy. MISD needs to be focused on college-readiness instruction, maximizing the AP programs and looking into the International Baccalaureate program to increase the number of students who choose

college and give them the tools to be successful. We also need comprehensive career training for students who don't plan to go to college to give them a sustainable career.

5. What should the school district do to reduce the dropout rate?

MISD has a drop-out specialist and program working to keep every student enrolled in high school. Prevention starts by actively tracking attendance to identify at-risk students. Intervention can include alerting the parents, fines or teen court. Some judges now make a GED a requirement of release from juvenile detention. McKinney ISD's LINC Center provides a personalized education to students who need a different learning environment, and Serenity High, is designed for students returning from drug and alcohol rehab programs. Extracurricular programs are also vital in keeping students connected to their school who might otherwise drop out.

6. What should the school district do to address the problem of obesity in children?

The District teaches students about nutrition and healthy eating habits beginning in elementary school. They are taught the basics of how to read a nutrition label and what makes a nutritious diet. Elementary students have recess and physical education, while middle and high school students may participate in athletics and are taught about the health effects of exercise. School lunches offer healthy choices.

7. What are the most important issues you think will come before the school district in the next three years? What are your views on these issues?

First, the lack of bonding capacity may require hard choices if enrollment continues to grow and there is not adequate funding for new facilities. Second, the disparity in enrollment between McKinney North and McKinney Boyd high schools. I am hopeful the open enrollment into North with help with this situation. If the economy continues to improve, development in the North zone will increase, so this is a complicated issue with no simple solution. I would like to bring together parents, administrators and board members to seek out new options before making any changes.

### **Curtis Rippee**

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1. Please describe the training and experience that qualify you for this office.

With business experience and a heart for education, I have the right combination to be an asset to the MISD Board. I have three elementary aged children in the district. My father was a teacher for 30 years, so I grew up around education and it still remains dear to me. I'm the Founder of StratiFi Partners, a financial consulting firm, and a licensed CPA. My community involvement includes serving on the board of three non-profit organizations, including the McKinney Education Foundation. I am a

Junior Achievement volunteer. I serve on my church's finance committee and teach two bible studies.

2. How should the school district weather the current financial downturn: reduced services or personnel, increased fees, delayed construction, other measures?

Like any organization, the district must operate within its means. Funds to operate the district on a daily basis and funds for capital projects have different elements that make each challenging to manage. Operating funds are determined by the state and are based on the number of students. Funds for capital projects are limited only by property tax values and a maximum tax rate. With 80% of operating funds expended on personnel, making sure we hire and retain the best possible teachers and administrators is critical. Capital projects will require close examination to ensure they are cost effective and necessary.

3. What is the best way to reward good teachers? Do you think that the state's merit pay plan for teachers with matching local fund requirements is an effective use of the school district's funds?

Rewarding teachers is a necessary part of attracting and retaining the best. Reward systems should be developed locally rather than by state mandate. Local district leadership is best able to determine what will be most effectively in that system. I like the concept of standardized tests and quantifiable measuring tools for determining the effectiveness of a school system or a teacher. However, they are clearly not the only measures of success in education. I favor a hybrid system in which standard test scores, individual student progress, as well as, administration and parent evaluations would play a part in evaluating teachers.

4. How should this district prepare students for success whether they are college-bound or not?

To be an effective public education system, a district must establish curriculum that serves a broad range of students. While Advanced Placement courses are critical to a district's curriculum, the Career and Technical programs are equally important. The education experience is not just about knowledge but also about interpersonal skills, relationships, culture awareness, etc. Fine arts, athletics, and community involvement are equally important in helping these students become effective member of society. Ensuring students have access to the programs that will benefit them as individuals is paramount.

5. What should the school district do to reduce the dropout rate?

The Partners in Education program, specifically the REACH mentor program, can play a critical role in lowering the drop out rate. The REACH program is a mentoring program designed to foster a basic sense of self-esteem, self confidence and motivation to learn and to improve personal and social skills that reinforces the importance of education. I have personally seen the impact members of the community are having on the lives of at risk students in our schools. Students in this program are less likely to drop out and the program not only benefits the student but the mentor as well.

6. What should the school district do to address the problem of obesity in children?

While I believe it is not the district's primary role to prevent obesity in children, I do believe a district should be a positive influence in trying to resolve the problem. Giving the students an understanding of the cause and risks of obesity should be a part of the education process. Physical education should remain a key part of the student's school day. Students should be taught personal responsibility with regard to dietary habits and healthy choices should always be an essential part of school breakfast and lunch programs.

7. What are the most important issues you think will come before the school district in the next three years? What are your views on these issues?

Zoning will continue to be an issue for the foreseeable future as the district attempts to balance the expected growth with the optimum use of the existing facilities. I would be a proponent of forming an on-going zoning committee that would consist of individuals from the central administration office, campus teachers, and community members. We need to measure and monitor the effectiveness of these zoning decisions so we can make the choices that are in the best interest of our students and our community. Funding of a much needed natatorium will be a focus as well.