

CMS

■ from 1A

their first run for office in Mecklenburg County, and none of the 14 has won a countywide campaign. Two are on the ballot but not actively campaigning.

The candidates offer an array of experience: Classroom teachers, CMS parents and volunteers, people with business and nonprofit careers.

Powerful role

The three elected will join six district representatives who are also fairly new. Once the trio is sworn in Dec. 13, Vice Chairman Tom Tate will be the only member with more than two years' experience.

Even before they take office, the winners will be swept into the superintendent search, in hopes that the new board can make their hire in early spring.

The candidates offer sharp contrasts on a range of issues, starting with the path charted by the current board and former Superintendent Peter Gorman.

"We are in a crisis at CMS," says Ken Nelson, who calls for tossing out the board's strategic plan, ending the national superintendent search and severing all ties to national reform groups. "I believe in getting to the root cause of a problem and fixing it, even if that means scrapping the whole thing."

Tim Morgan, elected to represent District 6 two years ago, got into the at-large race to prevent that kind of swing.

"In the last five years, the CMS strategic plans have helped us achieve unprecedented growth in the classroom," says Morgan, who argues current efforts need tweaking, not reversal. If Morgan wins, the board will appoint a new District 6 member to serve until 2013; if he loses, he keeps his district seat.

During the last at-large school board election in 2007, voters returned incumbents Kaye McGarry, Trent Merchant and Joe White. Other than name recognition, no common thread was clear; the three often clash on philosophy and personal style.

The margin of victory was slim. White topped fourth-place finisher Liz Downing by fewer than 3,000 votes, or 17 percent to 16 percent (first-place McGarry had 21 percent).

Now that all three are stepping down, the race could be even closer. The list of candidates is twice as long. And turnout may be even lower than 24 percent in 2007, when a school bond vote sparked voter interest.

What moves voters?

This year's candidates have played roles in issues that dominated recent news.

Elyse Dashew, a first-time candidate who has led in fundraising, started as a magnet parent keeping an eye on changes to those programs. Last spring she co-founded MeckFUTURE, a group that lobbied for more public spending to fend off teacher layoffs and other classroom cuts.

Ericka Ellis-Stewart had a son at Harding High when a proposal to close that school and others led to public outcry. She spoke at many public

meetings, telling the board that minority and lower-income families felt shortchanged by plans to focus closings in their neighborhoods.

Hans Plotseneder, a West Mecklenburg High School teacher, was arrested for refusing to leave during protests at a meeting on school closings (the charge was later dismissed). He joins Mary McCray, recently retired president of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Association of Educators, and Aaron Pomis, a charter-school administrator and former teacher, in trying to bring a classroom perspective to a board that has grappled with layoffs, wage freezes and controversy over how to evaluate and pay teachers.

Meanwhile, some have complained that suburban schools are left with huge classes and bare-bones budgets as CMS pumps extra money and teachers into high-poverty schools. Nelson and Larry Bumgarner, who wants to split CMS into smaller districts, are campaigning partly on suburban issues.

For all the recent turmoil, Mecklenburg's business and political leaders aren't feeling the sense of crisis that led to a bond defeat and creation of a private task force about five years ago. Former Charlotte Mayor Harvey Gantt and former N.C. Gov. Jim Martin, both of whom were summoned to rally support during past CMS crises, drew a blank when asked about this year's issues and candidates.

Merchant, one of the departing board members, says he's learned that hot-button themes don't motivate large numbers of voters, especially in a countywide race. Most voters aren't CMS parents or employees, he said; instead, they're taxpayers looking for someone who can spend money wisely and keep public schools out of controversy and crisis.

Information overload?

Anyone with an Internet connection can delve deep on the candidates. Various groups have posted written questionnaires and videotaped interviews. The challenge can be finding time to sort through it.

The Swann Fellowship, a nonprofit that promotes diversity in schools, asked all the candidates 10 questions this summer and posted their responses online. It's more than 10 hours of video, set up so viewers can select specific questions and/or candidates.

As the campaign enters the final stretch, the 12 active contenders are engaged in a blur of forums, interviews, social events and endorsement meetings.

The large slate poses challenges for hosts. Groups have tried a variety of approaches, from rapid-fire questions to having the candidates move from group to group for "kitchen table" talks.

MeckEd, a nonprofit advocacy group, posted candidate questionnaires this summer and will host an interactive debate on Wednesday, with a live audience, webstreaming and reports on social media.

"I hope people do tune in," said Carl Armato, a Novant Health executive who chairs MeckEd. "This is a crucial election."

Helms: 704-358-5033

DECISION 2011

About the candidates

Note: Answers have been edited for brevity and clarity.



Larry Bumgarner
Retiree making his third try for school board. Deconsolidate.com

Direction

Does the strategic plan approved by the current board provide the right general direction for CMS to move forward? If you think a change is needed, including in the search for a superintendent, please explain.

Achievement

What is the most important thing CMS should do to improve achievement and graduation rates?

Resources

CMS provides more money and staff to schools with higher need, as measured by poverty levels. Do you believe CMS should change the way it allocates resources, and if so, how?



Elyse Dashew
Volunteer and CMS parent making first run for office. ElyseDashew.com

■ **Direction:** The strategic plan is moving CMS in the right direction. I would adjust it for teachers to play a more meaningful role in developing measurements for their effectiveness. We should seek a superintendent who can build on our progress but also inspire and engage our community.

■ **Achievement:** We need to build upon successful partnership programs with businesses, nonprofit agencies, houses of faith and institutions of higher education. We need to shine a light on the successes and scale up programs that are working in order to serve more children.

■ **Resources:** Our region's prosperity depends on a skilled, productive workforce, which means aiming for all children to be well educated. Weighted student staffing has been proven effective in increasing student achievement and narrowing the achievement gap. Therefore I support this policy.



Ericka Ellis-Stewart
Former dropout-prevention worker and CMS parent making first run for office. Ericka4CMSBoard.com

■ **Direction:** I applaud parts of the plan that foster collaboration and align support services with daily instruction. I am concerned with areas that have created angst among teachers and parents. The plan speaks to having an effective principal at each school and more effective succession planning. These are central to my goals.

■ **Achievement:** Increase the level of expectation for CMS students. Place a highly effective teacher in every classroom. Assign a team of prepared and engaged administrators to each school over a continuous period of time to ensure continuity.

■ **Resources:** CMS' goal should be to provide the resources that are necessary to ensure that all children across the district excel. Some methods have been more successful than others. As the socioeconomic gap widens, the need to address the impact of poverty in our schools becomes an even greater challenge.



Keith Hurley
Banker and CMS parent making first run for office. KeithHurley.com

■ **Direction:** When you factor in a recession with the 2014 plan it is a game-changing event. CMS does not have a strategic plan in place to move outside the 2014 plan or a superintendent to make that move. The search for the new superintendent is costing way too much and is a Delphi Technique — backing into a known outcome.

■ **Achievement:** We must empower our teachers to teach. We have lost their trust as a board and I am 100 percent in favor of giving principals, teachers and parents more autonomy. The "Village System Model" is a proven educational program.

■ **Resources:** I think the weighted student staffing approach is working and would not change it today. Some kids need a "bigger push" to learn or more time on certain subjects. If we have the best teachers in those "key schools" it will pay down the road with greater graduation rates.



Mary McCray
Retired teacher and former CMS parent making first run for office. MaryMcCrayforSchoolBoard.webs.com

■ **Direction:** The strategic plan provides direction if we have school leaders who are well versed in curriculum. Strong faculty must be led by proven administrators who are committed to staying around to make sure that reforms come to fruition. The superintendent search process should be slowed down.

■ **Achievement:** Improve employee morale and empower them to make changes to benefit students. Provide alternate pathways to the diploma. Make education relevant for students who aren't college/university bound.

■ **Resources:** Personnel costs drive the differences in CMS per-pupil allotments. Federal funds pay for additional personnel in Title I schools due to high poverty levels. So the only way to make sure the funding is equal is to make all of them high poverty or none of them high poverty.



Tim Morgan
District 6 board member and CMS parent. MorganforSchoolBoard.net

■ **Direction:** CMS strategic plans have helped us achieve unprecedented growth. We need a superintendent who will continue what is working, identify weaknesses and provide refinements to the plan so all of our students can reach their maximum academic performance.

■ **Achievement:** We need to ensure an effective teacher is in every classroom, an effective principal is leading every school, resources are provided, and that we set high expectations for our students and employees.

■ **Resources:** Weighted student staffing and strategic staffing are working and helping CMS to close the achievement gap and improve the graduation rate. We need to make sure we are providing each child with the resources necessary for them to be successful.



Ken Nelson
Business analyst and preschool parent making first board run. KenWNelson.com

■ **Direction:** I would scrap the strategic plan. De-emphasize standardized testing. Get away from all "philanthropic" organizations whose money comes with strings attached. The superintendent search is too important to turn over to a national firm. We need a new direction, which is Mecklenburg-focused.

■ **Achievement:** Schools cannot fix 50 years of government policies that have subsidized failure, rewarded mediocrity and punished success. Refocus our energies on vocational programs so those who are not college material can be productive.

■ **Resources:** One side of the county is subsidizing the other to a tune of three times more, and it is not working. Resources are not the answer. We can spend all the money we have on our troubled schools and it won't make a difference until we have discipline, parental involvement and a willingness to stop social promotion.



Hans Plotseneder
West Meck teacher making his third run for school board. DrPlots.com

■ **Direction:** The strategic plan does not include clear policies for a testing strategy that reflects the expectations of parents and the public, or a compensation plan that rewards high performance. The superintendent search needs to focus on finding the best person to implement board policies.

■ **Achievement:** CMS needs to focus on "purposeful learning" and implement a consistent, teacher-driven student discipline. Introduce optional career-oriented high school curricula offering associate degrees, in addition to the college-prep curriculum.

■ **Resources:** No changes should be made to the current equity factors as long as all schools suffer under a lack of appropriate instructional means. Equip students and teachers with the tools to become competitive. For example, our classrooms have less technology than some classrooms in developing countries.



Aaron Pomis
KIPP Academy dean of instruction making his second run for school board. AaronPomis.com

■ **Direction:** The strategic plan provides the right general direction. Unfortunately, by doing a poor job enlisting the voices of teachers and community in the execution of many policies in the past year, we have made it hard to communicate many of our common beliefs, and we have become fixated on what separates us.

■ **Achievement:** We need to give our teachers the right resources, professional development, support, and training to be successful. If we know that so many of our students are coming in two or three grade levels behind their peers, we must prepare our staff to take on that challenge.

■ **Resources:** We need more of our best teachers and leaders in schools where students face more challenges. Too often we pit communities against each other by saying we will fund either the under-resourced or classrooms for the overcrowded. Put both of those huge priorities on the table and cut what is less important.



Darrin Rankin
Insurance agent and CMS parent making first school board run. RankinForCMS.com

■ **Direction:** Yes, the plan provides the right direction. It places an emphasis on results as well as empowering teachers and staff. We have to make certain that we are empowering all teachers/principals/staff to make the necessary adjustments, and that the emphasis on results begins with quality instruction.

■ **Achievement:** Listen to the needs of each school. Set more money aside for schools to use once they create their strategic plans. Creating plans on how to improve the classrooms with no money available to support such plans is a worthless task. We need quality teachers in every class.

■ **Resources:** We should continue with programs/processes that are working (showing measurable results) and we should put those programs/processes that are not providing quality results back on the table for review and modifications. The board needs to spend money wisely.



Lloyd Scher
Four-term Mecklenburg County commissioner making first run for school board. LloydScher.com

■ **Direction:** I would like to try Continuity of Education or Mastery of Learning, where K-2 students stay with one teacher to learn to read and then move on to another teacher for 3-5. This allows students and teachers to know each other better and makes everyone accountable.

■ **Achievement:** We need to invest funds into our schools using more technology for teachers and students. CMS cannot do it alone; we need the help of the community. We should be able to find 5,000 volunteers to help with tutoring, reading or being a lunch buddy to a student.

■ **Resources:** We need to provide all the help we can to these schools. We should obtain as much help as possible from the community to assist our teachers and help the students. Schools could be the catalyst to not only help a student but also help a family.



Jeff Wise
Information services director and preschool parent making first run for office. VoteJeffWise.com

■ **Direction:** CMS' strategic plan is still relevant as it relates to implementing technology, setting and meeting high standards and transforming the use of resources. Other parts need rethinking, such as measuring students and teachers with increased testing.

■ **Achievement:** Give students opportunities and options. Use technology, arts and distance learning to reach out to students who are not engaged. If we can provide schools the ability to customize methods to match students' needs, we can raise achievement levels.

■ **Resources:** The present method of allocating resources is showing progress, but we should also take academic levels into consideration. Each school's administration and teachers should determine, and then receive as best possible, the necessary resources to reach each individual student.

World population set to hit 7 billion Oct. 31

The increase could drain most-populated countries' resources.

By DAVID CRARY
Associated Press

She's a 40-year-old mother of eight, with a ninth child due soon. The family homestead in a Burundi village is too small to provide enough food, and three of the children have quit school for lack of money to pay required fees.

"I regret to have made all those children," says Godelive Ndageramiwe. At Ahmed Kasadha's prosperous farm in eastern Uganda, it's a different story.

"My father had 25 children — I have only 14 so far, and expect to produce more in the future," says Kasadha, who has two wives. He considers a large family a sign of success and a guarantee of support when he's old. By the time Ndageramiwe's ninth child arrives, and any further members of the Kasadha clan, the world's pop-

ulation will have passed a momentous milestone. As of Oct. 31, according to the U.N. Population Fund, there will be 7 billion people sharing Earth's land and resources.

In Western Europe, Japan and Russia, it will be an ironic milestone amid worries about low birthrates and aging populations. In China and India, the two most populous nations, it's an occasion to reassess policies that have already slowed once-rapid growth.

But in Burundi, Uganda and the rest of sub-Saharan Africa the region has the world's highest birthrates and deepest poverty. Is catastrophe inevitable? Not necessarily. But experts say most high-growth developing nations will be hard-pressed to furnish enough food, water and jobs for their people, especially without major new family-planning initiatives.

Looking ahead, the U.N. projects that the world population will reach 8 billion by 2025, 10 billion by 2083.

Background checks

The Observer ran civil and criminal record checks on all the school board candidates; none turned up significant problems in their recent past.

Inactive

■ **Lisa Hundley** withdrew from the race for health reasons after the ballot was printed.
■ **DeShauna McLamb** has not attended campaign events, answered candidate surveys or replied to queries about her status.