

2 Democrats vie for Pender school board

Moore, Robbins competing for open District 4 seat

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PENDER COUNTY — As long-serving Pender County Board of Education member Katherine Herring prepares to leave her seat, two Democrats are vying to take her place.

In the primary race for Pender's school District 4 — which encompasses the western third of the county— educators Reginald Moore and June Robbins are facing off. Here's where the candidates stand on school safety, growth in the county and more.

The winner of the primary moves on to November to face Republican Ken Smith, who did not draw a primary opponent.

1. What sets you apart from the other Democrat in the primary?

Moore: My cumulative experiences in corporate, public and charter education has afforded me opportunities to view education from a triangular lens of opportunity. Human services, schools and the parents must work in tandem for the 21st-century learner. My experience as a foster parent, and meeting the needs of children with challenges propelled me to learn how the aforementioned systems work interchangeably for positive outcomes on the home front. I have seen best practices implemented in various states, not just in North Carolina from the perspective of a parent, teacher, administrator and consultant.

Robbins: I worked years as a teacher and administrator in Pender County Schools. I know the challenges in the classroom and I have solved problems as an administrator. I have made it a point to form positive relationships with school boards, district directors, teachers, parents and students. Community involvement has always been a top priority. I will use this experience as a school board member.

2. Do you feel Pender County's schools are adequately secured against threats?

Moore: Pender County Schools are not adequately secured against threats. From the exterior, we still have schools with outdated blueprints. Anyone can walk on campus with access to students on sidewalks while changing classes. In addition, not all schools have School Resource Officers. Even the schools fortunate enough to have SROs need and should be required to have on-going professional training beyond the traditional status quo.

Robbins: As a school board member, I will continue securing Pender County Schools against threats by advocating for: nurses in every school, more school counselors and the addition of mental health specialists and social workers. These resources will make our student population healthier. We need School Resource Officers in every school who are highly trained. Open and continued communication with law enforcement is a must. School safety should be our number one priority.

3. As Pender County's coastal communities grow, how can the district ensure schools in the western part of the county are adequately funded and performing well?

Moore: There are a number of things the district can do to ensure leverage categorically inclusive of but not limited to the following: A comprehensive- needs assessment should be conducted annually per quadrant of the county. The Pender Education Partnership (PEP) should be challenged to explore additional creative funding streams through corporate, philanthropic, and grant initiatives. Finally, a systematic constructivist needs-based framework should be established and implemented.

Robbins: Each area of Pender County is a little different. As a teacher or administrator in five district schools, I am familiar with each community's needs. I will take my experience and make sure every school has a facility that promotes student safety and achievement. Also, I will work hard to ensure every student has the staff and resources to meet the needs of their students.

4. How should the district raise performance in the district's "C" and "D"-graded schools?

Moore: I would first suggest more project-based instruction which involves movement every 20 minutes. Research already tells us, children best ascertain information in 20 minute intervals. I would also suggest more cross curriculum instruction, and curriculum looping. This provides a student with more than one opportunity to master content. Finally, using the data to drive instruction, the implementation of pull-outs similar to the supplemental educational services design formerly utilized, would ensure a longitudinal study of progress.

Robbins: Instead of more money for things, we need to work on changing the vision of principals, teachers and students. The vision should be what is the benefit of doing a program? What is the career aspect for the student? Can we answer, "When will I ever need to use this?" How vested are the teachers in what they are teaching? How vested are the students in what they are learning? How vested is the community? Do these groups truly see the benefit of what is being taught and learned? When this is accomplished, we will see test scores rise.

5. How can the district increase parental choice to compete with charter schools?

Moore: Having served in administration in a charter school, I can tell you parents know they have a voice in charter education. Should they encounter challenges at the school, they know their voice will be heard, and there is often an amicable solution in a short period of time. The district needs more competitive, planning, and parental engagement. It's OK to let the parents know that we are competing for the education of their child. Ask the parents what they want in a school, and make strides to achieve their desires.

Robbins: North Carolina has always allowed parents to choose educational options for their children — public, private, or home schooled. Charter schools are another type of public school. Our goal as a school district is to create, on each campus, an environment that will be every parent's choice for their child's education.

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