

2026 SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

St. Tammany Federation of Teachers and School Employees • Local 3952

PURPOSE

The Federation uses this questionnaire, candidate interviews, public records, and other relevant information when considering endorsements. We value responses that are specific, candid, and grounded in the responsibilities of a School Board member. Candidates need not agree with the Federation on every issue but should explain the principles and evidence that would guide their decisions.

Candidate information

Candidate: Tammy Harwell Penton

District: 5

Campaign email: tahpenton@gmail.com

Campaign phone: 985-590-8153

Campaign website: Facebook Page – Tammy Harwell Penton, MEd for STPSB, District 5

Submission and endorsement request

- ☒ I am seeking the endorsement of the St. Tammany Federation of Teachers and School Employees.
- ☐ I am not seeking the Federation's endorsement, but I am returning the questionnaire for member information.
- ☒ I am seeking consideration for an eligible political contribution.

Return by: Friday, August 28, 2026, at 11:45 p.m. **To:** union@stfed.org

Response guidance

Please keep each response to 200 words or fewer. Specific examples are encouraged. It is entirely appropriate to acknowledge that a question involves an area you would like to learn more about; if so, please explain how you would become informed and what principles would guide you in the meantime. The Federation may publish responses in full or in substantially complete form, with only formatting corrections.

Candidate certification

By typing my name below, I intend for my typed name to serve as my signature and certify that these responses reflect my own positions. I understand that the Federation may also consider my public record, candidate interview, and other relevant information.

Typed Signature: Tammy Harwell Penton **Date:** 8/27/2026

Background and priorities

1. Priorities and Preparation

Why are you seeking election to the St. Tammany Parish School Board? What are your three highest priorities, what experience or preparation do you bring, and how should voters judge whether you have been successful?

Response:

I am seeking election to the St. Tammany Parish School Board because I believe our district can once again achieve the high standards and level of excellence for which it was once known with the right leadership. I want to be a strong voice for students, parents, teachers, employees, and taxpayers while helping ensure decisions are made in the best interest of our children. My three highest priorities are restoring strong academics, improving transparency and accountability, and creating safe, supportive schools that attract and retain quality teachers and staff. Academically, I believe we need to get back to basics – books in students' hands, pencils, and pens to paper, handwriting, reading, writing, mathematics, classroom discussions, and critical thinking. Technology should be age-appropriate, purposeful, and balanced with traditional, teacher-led instruction rather than replacing it. I bring 15 years of experience in education, along with experience as a police officer, U.S. Air Force veteran, extensive education in personnel administration, justice studies, education, and curriculum and instruction. Voters should judge my success by improved academic performance, safer schools, stronger employee retention, reasonable spending, greater transparency, and whether our community feels heard and represented.

2. Record or Readiness

NEW CANDIDATES: What have you done to learn about the St. Tammany Parish Public Schools? What have you learned that most influences your decision to run?

INCUMBENTS: What are three important votes or actions from your current term? What promises have you kept, what work is still unfinished, and is there a decision you would make differently today?

Response:

My knowledge of St. Tammany Parish Public Schools comes from both personal experience and continued involvement in our community. I attended St. Tammany public schools, raised my children here, and spent part of my 15-year teaching career working in this district. I have experienced our schools as a student, parent, teacher and taxpayer. I continue to be a substitute teacher as well. I have also spoken with parents, teachers, employees, and community members about their experiences and concerns and have followed School Board decisions and issues affecting our schools. What most influenced my decision to run is seeing a school system that had historically been a source of pride in our parish no longer consistently achieving the level I know it can. I hear concerns about teacher morale and retention, student behavior and safety, communication, and the increasing dependence on technology in the classroom. I believe we need to listen to the people inside our schools and return our focus to strong academics, effective classroom instruction, safe and orderly schools, and support for

our teachers. St. Tammany has a strong foundation, and I am running for school board because I believe we can build upon it and raise the standard again.

Governance and employee voice

3. Parliamentary Procedure

How familiar are you with Robert's Rules of Order and the use of fair and consistent rules during Board meetings? 3-Working Knowledge

If elected, would you be willing to participate in training on Board governance and parliamentary procedure? Yes

4. Collective Bargaining

Do you support collective bargaining in St. Tammany Parish Public Schools? Yes

Compensation, finances, and working conditions

5. Employee Compensation

Do you believe compensation for certificated and support employees is competitive? No

6. District Finances

Rate your knowledge of STPPS finances and budget. 2-Limited Knowledge

7. Recruitment, Retention, and Working Conditions

What do you believe affects the district's ability to hire and keep good employees? (Examples might include workload, planning time, duties, class sizes or caseloads, administrative support, career growth, morale, and professional respect.)

Response:

I believe recruiting good employees begins with creating a district where good employees want to stay. Competitive pay matters, but compensation alone will not solve recruitment and retention problems. Employees also need reasonable workloads, adequate planning time, manageable class sizes and caseloads, consistent administrative support, and the resources necessary to do their jobs well. As a former teacher, I understand how quickly morale suffers when educators spend too much time on paperwork, unnecessary meetings, excessive testing, changing initiatives, or duties that take them away from teaching and planning. Teachers want to teach. We should examine requirements that consume valuable instructional or planning time and determine whether they are truly benefiting

students. I also believe we need to restore greater balance in how instruction is delivered. Technology has an appropriate place in education, but it should be a tool, not a curriculum or the teacher. I support returning to more traditional, teacher-led instruction with books in students' hands, handwriting, paper and pencil work, classroom discussion, and critical thinking, while using age-appropriate technology where it genuinely improves learning. Teachers should have the professional flexibility to teach rather than simply manage students through digital programs. Professional respect is equally important. Teachers and support personnel need to know that their experience and concerns are heard before decisions are made that directly affect their classrooms and working conditions. Strong administrators should support employees, communicate expectations clearly, and address problems consistently and fairly. We must also recognize the important work of all support employees as well. Every employee contributes to a successful school system. When employees feel supported, respected, and trusted to do their jobs, retention improves. That stability benefits our students and helps St. Tammany return to the higher educational standards our community had long expected.

Teaching, learning, and school climate

8. Professional Autonomy and Instructional Decisions

When a school uses a scripted curriculum, how much freedom should educators have to adjust the lesson, pace, or teaching methods to meet their students' needs?

Response:

Educators should have meaningful professional autonomy to adjust lessons, pacing, and instructional methods based on the needs of the students in front of them. A curriculum should provide standards, structure, and clear academic expectations, but it should not be so rigid that teachers are simply reading a script. Teachers are trained professionals who know when students need additional explanation, more practice, enrichment, or a different approach. They should also have the flexibility to use proven traditional methods, including textbooks, direct instruction, discussion, and hands-on learning rather than being required to read a script or rely excessively on technology. We should trust teachers to teach while holding them accountable for meeting strong academic standards. The goal should be a consistent, high-quality curriculum across the district with enough flexibility for educators to use their experience and professional judgment to help every student succeed.

9. Safe and Supportive Schools

How should the district handle violence, threats, bullying, repeated behavior problems, and other behavior that makes it hard to learn or feel safe, while also protecting student rights and giving students the help they need?

Response:

Student safety must come first. Students cannot learn and teachers cannot teach effectively when violence, threats, bullying, or repeated disruptive behavior are allowed to interfere with the classroom. The district must have clear, consistently enforced expectations for behavior, with meaningful consequences for serious or repeated violations. At the same time, discipline should be fair, age appropriate, and protect the rights of all students. We must distinguish between minor classroom behavior and conduct that threatens the safety or learning of others. Teachers and administrators need the authority and support to address problems before they escalate, and parents should be informed and involved early. Parent accountability is a vital role that should be established with clear expectations. We need to look beyond discipline alone. Students experiencing behavioral, emotional

social, or academic difficulties should have access to appropriate counseling, intervention, and other support. When necessary, alternative educational settings should be available so students can continue receiving an education without repeatedly disrupting the learning or safety of others. As a former teacher and police officer with school resource officer experience, I understand both sides of this issue. Our schools should be safe, orderly environments where teachers can teach, students can learn, and every child is treated fairly while being held accountable for his or her behavior.

10. Educational Opportunity and Student Success

What school programs and opportunities for students should the district improve or add? (Examples might include reading, math, job and career programs, advanced classes, libraries, special education, English language support, gifted programs, art, music, sports, clubs, and other activities.)

Response:

I believe St. Tammany should offer strong educational opportunities for every student, whether that student is college bound, career focused, gifted, struggling academically, or receiving special education services. First, we must strengthen the foundation: reading, writing, math, science, and critical thinking skills. I support returning to a better balance of traditional instruction: books in students' hands, handwriting, paper and pencil work, teacher-led instruction, hands-on learning, and discussions, with technology used appropriately as a tool rather than becoming the primary method of instruction. I would like to see the district strengthen and expand gifted and advanced academic opportunities while also increasing career and technical education, vocational programs, more dual enrollment, internships, and partnerships that prepare students not only for college but for the workforce. Finally, a well-rounded education consists of the arts, music, and other creative educational outlets. It is known that many people learn from using the creative side of their brain through art and music. Additionally, programs that involve kinesthetic movement such as PE, sports, and various clubs are also important for the whole child concept. These things are meaningful and need to remain part of our schools. Student success should not be defined by one pathway, one test score, or one subject. Our responsibility is to provide students with a strong academic foundation while helping each child discover his or her abilities, interests, and path towards a successful future.

11. Artificial Intelligence, Technology, and Screen Time

How should the district approach AI, technology, student devices, and screen time? (Consider topics such as instructional value, age-appropriate limits, academic integrity, AI literacy, student data privacy, cybersecurity, and the role of educators and parents before new technologies or requirements are adopted.)

Response:

I believe technology should support education, not drive it. We need a balanced age-appropriate approach that protects traditional instruction while gradually introducing technology as students mature. In a pre-K through 2nd grade environment, technology should not be part of regular instruction, except for limited, supervised use at a computer station during center time. Learning should be focused on teachers, books, handwriting, manipulatives, play, movement, and face-to-face interaction. In grades third through fifth grades technology should remain minimal and limited to specific educational purposes and basic computer skills. Teacher LED instruction, textbooks, handwriting, paper and pencil work, hands-on activities, and independent problem solving should remain a priority. Once students reach 6th through 8th grades, technology can be gradually integrated for research, writing, presentations,

keyboarding, and digital literacy while maintaining strong traditional instruction and independent work. High school students should learn to use technology and AI responsibly and effectively in preparation for college, technical training, the military, and the workforce, while demonstrating they can think and work independently without relying on technology. We must also recognize concerns associated with excessive screen use, including anxiety, depression, sleep disruption, attention difficulties, reduced physical activity, social isolation, and technology dependence. Schools should not unnecessarily add to students' screen exposure. AI requires clear expectations for academic integrity, accuracy, privacy, and responsible use. New technology should be evaluated for educational value, age appropriateness, cybersecurity, and student data privacy, with meaningful teacher and parent input. Finally, technology should support the classroom teacher or the classroom environment. We also must remember that for our students to be competitive and continue moving forward, technology has a necessary place at the appropriate age.

Accountability

12. Accountability and Accessibility

If elected, how will you stay available to employees and the public, communicate with Federation representatives, and protect employees' right to speak up about workplace concerns? If you make a decision that is different from what you said during your campaign, how will you explain that decision to the public?

Response:

If elected, I will remain accessible to employees, parents, and the public and will make communication a priority. School board members cannot effectively represent their communities if they are unwilling to listen. I will be available by phone, e-mail, and in person and I will make a sincere effort to respond to concerns and follow up when answers are needed. I also believe maintaining open communication with federation representatives is important. Employees deserve to have their concerns heard, whether they involve working conditions, classroom challenges, safety, workload, or other issues affecting their ability to serve students effectively. Employees must be able to raise legitimate workplace concerns without fear of retaliation. I will respect and defend their right to speak, ask questions, and use the appropriate channels available to them. Having spent 15 years as an educator, I understand how important it is for employees to know that their voice matters. Finally, I will be accountable for my own decisions. I intend to govern according to the principles and priorities I have presented during this campaign. However, board members sometimes receive information after an election that was not previously available. If new facts require me to take a different position, I will explain what changed, why it changed, and the reasoning behind my decision. Accountability means being willing to answer for your decisions, especially when they are difficult.
