



## COUNTY CANDIDATES OFFER INSIGHTS INTO THEIR BIDS FOR OFFICE

Candidates are vying for County Commission, Board of Education, various judicial offices and even the Georgia House of Representatives in the May 24 Columbia County primary elections. Most of those candidates stepped up and answered questions about their ambitions and qualifications.

A handful did not respond to attempts to contact them or did provide information, in some cases because they're running unopposed.

Early voting begins Monday, May 2.

None of the candidates for several unopposed Columbia County races submitted profile information. Those include both judges running for reelection, James Blanchard Jr. and J. Wade Padgett. District Attorney Bobby L. Christine also failed to submit his profile information. Mark Newton, candidate for the Georgia House of Representatives, also did not submit any information.

# COLUMBIA COUNTY COMMISSION CHAIR

**Candidate:** Douglas R. Duncan, Jr., is running unopposed

**Age, hometown**

59, Augusta, Ga.

**Family**

Wife of 34 years, Jean, three children, one grandchild

**Education**

Bachelor of Business Administration, Augusta University

**Work/professional experience**

Vice president, MAU

**Why do you want to hold the office you are seeking?**

To continue to make a difference by controlling government growth and protecting private property rights

**What changes would you like to see made to the office you're seeking?**

I believe, although not perfect, Columbia County is run well. We do our best to act in the best interest of all citizens. We need to continue on the current path.

**What goals do you have now if you are successful in the election?**

Continue to lower the millage rate while investing in law enforcement, first responders, infrastructure and quality of life projects.

**What would you do, if anything, to make the office you seek accountable to the public?**

Columbia County, the office of chairman and board of commissioners are totally open and accountable to the public.





# COLUMBIA COUNTY COMMISSION DISTRICT 1

**Candidate:** Connie Melear is running unopposed

**Age, hometown**

48, originally from Toccoa Ga.

**Family**

Husband Drew, children Bryce, 2, and Brynlee, 17

**Education**

Bachelor in accounting, University of Georgia

**Work/professional experience**

Construction industry since 1996, mostly in a financial and executive capacity.

**Why do you want to hold the office you are seeking?**

Having served on local boards and enjoyed community service, being an elected official was the next logical step for me. I have enjoyed this term and love being able to affect the community in a positive way.

**What changes would you like to see made to the office you’re seeking?**

Unanswered

**What goals do you have now if you are successful in the election?**

I have several initiatives started that I would like to see to the end: one that is very tangible is the Wayfinding Signage that you see popping up all over. The next phase of that program is Gateway Beautification. We hope to soon have “Welcome to Columbia County” boldly displayed at our main entry points.

**What would you do, if anything, to make the office you seek accountable to the public?**

When the public speaks about what they do and do not want in this community, we need to listen and govern accordingly. The constituents in my district have made clear their opposition to residential density and I feel it is my duty to represent them in all the choices that come in front of me for a vote.



# COLUMBIA COUNTY COMMISSION DISTRICT 4

**Candidate:**Alison Couch

**Age, hometown**

41, Harlem, Ga.

**Family**

Chad Couch, Kids: Ryan and Katie Bek

**Education**

Bachelors and masters degrees from Georgia Southern University

**Work/professional experience**

18.5 years in public accounting. Nine years small business owner

**Why do you want to hold the office you are seeking?**

I want to serve my neighbors in District 4. I want to be an advocate for our issues. I want to improve communication from the county to the citizens, business owners and municipalities here.

**What changes would you like to see made to the office you’re seeking?**

I want to see fresh ideas and initiatives on communication and broadband expansion.

**What goals do you have now if you are successful in the election?**

Improve communication, improve broadband access, advocate for smart and well-timed growth, bring improvements and additions to our parks and walking trails.

**What would you do, if anything, to make the office you seek accountable to the public?**

Communicate with and meet with the citizens to update them on issues important to them.



— THE —  
AUGUSTA  
PRESS  
SUBSCRIBE  
TODAY

# COLUMBIA COUNTY COMMISSION DISTRICT 4

**Candidate:** Dewey G. Galeas

**Age, hometown**

66, Frankfort, Mich. Lived in District 3 for 44 years

**Family**

Wife of 43 years, Brenda Galeas; three children, five grandchildren

**Education**

Bachelor of Science in nursing, University of Texas

Anesthesiology US Army Fort Sam Houston Texas

**Work/professional experience**

Retired US Army Officer. Combat tour, first Gulf War 101st Airborne Division.

Self-employed nurse anesthetist.

Board member, State Veterans Committee.

Planning and Zoning, three years.

Board member Columbia County Cares.

Columbia County Health Board.

**Why do you want to hold the office you are seeking?**

Having the privilege to serve as the District 4 commissioner has taught me valuable lessons in the needs of my district and Columbia County. Continuity and experience are elements of success. Columbia County must remain safe and strong.

**What changes would you like to see made to the office you're seeking?**

The citizens would benefit from a more effective communication system(s) to/from their commissioners. It is key to share information.

**What goals do you have now if you are successful in the election?**

Smart management of growth. Proactive infrastructure and roads. Expansion of broadband. Protection of our special places in District 4.

**What would you do, if anything, to make the office you seek accountable to the public?**

Continue term limits. Mandatory Town Halls (I have held three). Maintain an open-door policy.



RIVER  
SIDE



HEATING & AIR CONDITIONING

Georgia: 706-945-5227

South Carolina: 803-634-2062

<https://www.riversideheatandac.com>

# COLUMBIA COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD DISTRICT 2

**Candidate:** Kristi P. Baker

**Age, hometown**

47, Clemson, S.C. I have lived in Columbia County for 29 years.

**Family**

Husband: Daryn ( 31 years married)

Children: Jonathan Baker and wife Jackie Baker, Joshua Baker and Elizabeth Baker

**Education**

Bachelor of Science in nursing

Associate Degree in physical therapist assistant

**Work/professional experience**

Integra Rehabilitation Co. since 2008

Harrington Park Health and Rehabilitation

Stevens Park Health and Rehabilitation

**Why do you want to hold the office you are seeking?**

Because I am a strong advocate and supporter of public education, I want to continuing supporting the students, teachers and staff and making sure that the CCSD continues to provide a quality education to every one of our children.

As a taxpayer, homeowner and parent, I want to make sure our community has great schools and is a wonderful place to raise a family and attend public schools.

I have the experience of being on the Columbia County School Board. Since being elected in 2010 and serving for 11 years, CCSD has shown positive gains. Columbia County schools have increased their graduation rate from 75.9% to 92.33%, passed two E-SPLOST (no long term debt since 2012)

**What changes would you like to see made to the office you’re seeking?**

Remain nonpartisan

**What goals do you have now if you are successful in the election?**

To continue to provide options in educations, increase student achievement, increase graduation rate.

Provide a workplace that supports staff. Open communication, provide training and professional development programs that are beneficial to staff, provide a safe and positive environment for students, engaging events with parents. Maintain a positive work environment.

**What would you do, if anything, to make the office you seek accountable to the public?**

We, (the BOE) are 100% accountable to the public for the student achievement of each student.

Maintain a fiscally sound budget. All meetings are open to the public; we provide public participation at our regular meeting. Maintain “open door policy.” Available by email, phone or in-person. Continue to support parent involvement with family programs





# COLUMBIA COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD DISTRICT 2

**Candidate: Lee Benedict**

**Age, hometown**

54, born in Newburgh, NY

**Family**

Wife of 25 years, one son now deceased

**Education**

New York state high school diploma, Cornwall Central High School, Cornwall, N.Y.

Bachelor of Arts in public relations, Mount Saint Mary College

Masters in Education in Special Education, Liberty University

Educational Specialist in Educational Psychology/Applied Cognition & Development, the University of Georgia

Masters of Public Administration, Augusta University

Doctor of Education (candidate, anticipated dissertation defense in August 2022) in Curriculum & Instruction in Special Education, Liberty University. Dissertation title: "Experiences of Black Students Who Participated as Defendants in a Youth Court For Violating a Zero-Tolerance Policy: A Transcendental Phenomenology."

**Work/professional experience**

Administrative District Intern for NYS Assemblywoman Nancy Calhoun, New Windsor, NY – Legislative Intern for US Senate Republican Policy Committee, Washington, DC

US Army (92Y, Unit Supply Specialist, Staff Sergeant), Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran; was in theater when war began, July 1996 – July 2004 –

Teacher, Richmond County School System, July 2004 – present. PAGE (Professional Association of Georgia Educators) member since employed

Author of the nationally distributed book Freedom Heist: The Left's Theft of Liberty

**Why do you want to hold the office you are seeking?**

So that Columbia County's schools are run by Columbia County. Too much state and federal interference and harmful leftist policies have infiltrated our schools, and someone needs to stand up for our students and teachers and county and push back against political appointees on the Georgia State Board of Education and against a federal government's mind-control agenda. I will not do anything to harm this county's students and teachers

**What changes would you like to see made to the office you're seeking?**

Encourage community participation at board meetings and allow them to speak. Respond to parent concerns in a timely respectful fashion. Give teachers the resources they NEED to do what is asked of them and reasonable latitude with which to do such.

**What goals do you have now if you are successful in the election?**

Make a good system better. Eliminate CRT...it HAS infiltrated our schools; Second Step (Columbia County has taken money to implement), professional development.

**What would you do, if anything, to make the office you seek accountable to the public?**

Web site explaining every vote I cast, successes of students and teachers in District 2 schools, budgets, suggestion box page, monthly gatherings throughout the district at various homes, subdivisions' clubhouses, businesses...media accessibility, honest and forthright responses to the extent allowable by law (certain matters may not be able to be discussed outside of executive session)



# COLUMBIA COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD DISTRICT 2

**Candidate: Sandy Steed**

**Age, hometown**

47, Leesville, Louisiana (It’s where my dad retired from the Army)

**Family**

Married to Dalton Steed,

Three children: Amber, 29; Kylee, 17; Zane, 13. One granddaughter, Anjelica, 3. Both younger children attend Columbia County Schools.

**Education**

Originally went to college for psychology, changed to nursing. Worked in the field for a little while and now a licensed massage therapist. My education is ongoing.

**Work/professional experience**

I currently (and have been for the last 15 years) work as a massage therapist in my own business (Massages by Sandy, LLC). In every field of work I’ve been in or sought, it’s been my calling to help people in some capacity. I’ve served people from all walks of life, creating relationships and being the sounding board for their concerns. Communication has always been important in every role so trust can be built. Educating patients and clients to provide the why and how so that they can be informed. Using critical thinking skills, collecting all data-subjective and objective, so that a plan can be made and executed toward the goal.

**Why do you want to hold the office you are seeking?**

To be of service to the community, sharing my knowledge, wisdom, talents and a different perspective in all areas of the duties of a school board member.

**What changes would you like to see made to the office you’re seeking?**

In a word: accountability. All decisions made even with the best intentions could possibly have a negative impact. Acknowledging not only the positives but also the short comings create transparency and trust with the community.

**What goals do you have now if you are successful in the election?**

My first goal is to start with the basics and that’s nutrition. All students need food to perform their best, just as a car needs gas—ensuring our students have the proper fuel. Goals after that is tackling the concerns of the community, one at a time all while maintaining open communication and adequate follow ups.

**What would you do, if anything, to make the office you seek accountable to the public?**

Ideally, providing the public with a forum-type atmosphere periodically where there can be dialogue, acknowledgment of the concerns and follow up steps/actions, ideally with all board members present along with superintendent.

I believe it is important to remember that board members are elected by the public/community; therefore it is imperative to uphold the office to the best of your ability while maintaining a relationship, by way of frequent communication with the public who placed you in office.



A photograph of a woman in a white dress lifting a young child into the air, both smiling. The background is a bright, indoor setting.

Thousands of  
**GIFT IDEAS**  
*Under \$1000 in store*

PERFECT FOR  
MOTHER’S DAY

**WINDSOR**  
FINE • JEWELERS  
Mon-Sat 10am-7pm



# COLUMBIA COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD DISTRICT 3

**Candidate:** Ashley Lee

**Age, hometown**

38, Evans, GA

**Family**

Justin (husband), Elle and Taylor, both 9 years old

**Education**

Augusta State University, Finance

**Work/professional experience**

18 years in banking. Worked in the areas of management and consumer and business lending. Co-owned and managed a business with my husband.



**Why do you want to hold the office you are seeking?**

We need transparency on the Board of Education. We need strong policies and accountability. Our current board won't take a stand on Critical Race Theory, and members have ignored parents who've shared concerns for a year instead of researching to find the truth and then allow the media to report on events to deflect from the truth. Parents have shared obscene sexual content for almost a year and ignored their own policies when parents asked for reviews of content, not to ban, but only to review. It wasn't until the content went public that the board pulled all content for review.

Our teachers, bus drivers and staff don't feel they have a voice or are supported. There's a discipline and bullying issue. Teachers say their hands are tied. We need to engage with them and find out what's working and what isn't, including in programs approved by the board.

We need to spend taxpayer money wisely and taxpayer money that supports our community values, which is not currently being done. A parent shouldn't have to do an Open Records Request to get the truth. Our school board should be transparent. They should be researching programs before approving. We should be hiring the best candidates for position and not based on skin color as the HR director said we should be doing.

**What changes would you like to see made to the office you're seeking?**

Stronger policies. More transparency. Teacher and staff support. Core education without indoctrination. Industry trade training in high school.

**What goals do you have now if you are successful in the election?**

I will be a proactive school board member and not reactive. I will ask questions and research. I will be engaged with teachers and staff to find what's working and what isn't and stand for improvement. I will listen to parent and community concerns instead of disregarding or twisting their words. I will ensure students are prepared for graduation without graduating just to keep a high graduation rate. I will stand for more industry/trade partnership with local businesses and will ensure every student is receiving a quality, core education. I will also research every professional development hire to ensure ideologies will not continue to be taught to teachers in our community. I will make sure student phones are not present in class. They must be kept away during learning. I will look into records of discipline programs, and if they aren't working, adjust our direction.

**What would you do, if anything, to make the office you seek accountable to the public?**

I will hold public quarterly meetings and share what we are working on in the district as well as listen to parent and community concerns. I will be a better listener than speaker. I will also arrive at least 30 minutes prior to each school board meeting to meet with any parent to discuss concerns/successes. My phone number and email will be available at any time. I will listen and be engaged, instead of disengaged and deny truths.



**JURYPEST.COM**

**(803)441-0007**

# COLUMBIA COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD DISTRICT 3

**Candidate:** Melvin Mahone

**Age, hometown**

Not given

**Family**

Married to Patricia Ann Mahone

**Education**

Ph.D. Criminal Justice/Corrections, Union Institute & University, Cincinnati, Ohio 2002

**Work/professional experience**

Over 30 years as an educator K-12, adjunct, dean, coordinator and assistant sociology professor. Currently employed as an assistant sociology professor at Paine College, Augusta, Georgia.

**Why do you want to hold the office you are seeking?**

Because for the love of the children, and to improve the educational system.

**What changes would you like to see made to the office you're seeking?**

Improve the following: vocational and special education curriculum; pay raise for teachers, more transparency between the school board and parents and for diversity and inclusion.

**What goals do you have now if you are successful in the election?**

To set policy and follow dictates of the law.

**What would you do, if anything, to make the office you seek accountable to the public?**

If elected, I will do everything possible to make the decisions made by the school board more transparent to the parents and citizens of Columbia County.



FOR LEASE

OFFICE/RETAIL SPACE

SHERMAN & HEMSTREET

Real Estate Company

THE LEGACY BUILDING

444 N Belair Rd, Evans, GA 30809

# COLUMBIA COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD DISTRICT 3

**Candidate:** Judy Simmons Teasley

**Age, hometown**

Old enough to vote! Born in Augusta, I have lived in Columbia County long enough to graduate from Evans, have two children graduate, and three grandchildren on track to graduate from Evans High School.

**Family**

Husband John; three grandchildren, a daughter-in-law, two sons and my parents who are all long county time residents.

**Education**

Education Specialist, Augusta State University

Master of Education, Augusta State University

Bachelor of Arts, Augusta College

Certified to teach social sciences and language arts in the middle grades and high school.

Endorsements in AP European History, AP United States History, Gifted in-Field, Teacher Support Specialist

**Work/professional experience**

Retired educator

Currently: Columbia County Board of Education District 3 representative

Past: Warren County High School, Washington County High School, Greenbrier High School, Augusta University, Evans Middle School, Retail

**Why do you want to hold the office you are seeking?**

Since education has long been a personal priority, my career has provided a thorough perspective on the significance of our schools as they prepare students for their future roles, in our community, as responsible adults. It is imperative that we address every component required for students to thrive and experience the highest possible level of academic achievement. I have the qualifications and I am committed to student achievement and the opportunities it provides. Therefore, I am seeking re-election to serve another term on the Columbia County Board of Education.

**What changes would you like to see made to the office you're seeking?**

It would be beneficial to our students for the board to establish a nonprofit foundation as a means of increasing support and enhancing the resources available to them as they pursue achievement and career options beyond the school level.

**What goals do you have now if you are successful in the election?**

My goals are to ensure continuous improvement of our schools; to seek additional opportunities for the academic achievement of all students; to increase the level of preparation students receive for the next phase of their lives, whether it includes academic pursuits or embraces the skilled trades; and, to increase community partnerships in our efforts to expand work-based learning partnerships.

**What would you do, if anything, to make the office you seek accountable to the public?**

Respectfully, the office I seek is accountable. To think otherwise is to misunderstand Georgia law as it relates to local boards of education. Though some find it convenient to ignore, and quote it out of context, according to O.C.G.A. 20-2-49, boards of education should be motivated by student achievement and work to maintain accreditation and the opportunities it allows. As a member of the CCBOE, the parents of the 28,000 students we serve hold me accountable for the achievement (and more) of their children EVERY SINGLE DAY! My inbox, my attendance at constituents' meetings and school functions indicates that, in addition to being accountable,



FULL SERVICE MANAGEMENT  
FOR  
HOMEOWNERS  
ASSOCIATIONS

SHERMAN &  
HEMSTREET  
Real Estate Company