

Richland One School Board Candidate Questionnaire

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this candidate questionnaire.

GROW is a non-partisan, pro-public education 501(c)(4) organization dedicated to improving educational outcomes for children in Richland County School District One (Richland One) through education, advocacy, and leadership accountability.

An informed public is integral to a successful election. In that spirit, please answer the following questions. GROW reserves the right to publish candidate responses, in whole or in part, with attribution. If a candidate does not respond, GROW reserves the right to share a "Did Not Respond" statement.

All responses must be submitted by 11:59 p.m. on Sunday, September 22, 2024.

Thank you for your time and for running for office.

Email *

steven.diaz84@gmail.com

Name *

Steven Diaz

What seat are you running for? *

At-Large

Seat 2

Seat 4

What in your background leads you to believe you would be an effective school board member? What skills do you bring to the office? *

As a Marine Corps veteran who served in combat and received a Purple Heart, I understand the true meaning of service, teamwork, and leadership. Achieving success in the military is no easy feat, and I believe the board needs to enhance collaboration with a strong focus on children. I am committed to fostering that focus through effective leadership and teamwork.

I graduated from the University of South Carolina with a bachelor's degree in Business and Human Resources. My experience includes assisting both nonprofits and businesses with their HR needs. As an HR Director, I was entrusted with all aspects of new hires, retention, development, conflict resolution, and offboarding. Many of the district's challenges stem from Human Resources issues, such as payroll, district policy, and timely onboarding. My skills will help identify these issues and create a strategic plan for improvement.

Additionally, I have been a licensed financial advisor since 2018. I have successfully assisted hundreds of clients and businesses in developing and maintaining healthy financial plans. Our district faces challenges related to transparency, and with my ethical background as a financial advisor, I am prepared to provide the stewardship needed for our tax dollars.

On a scale of 1 to 10, how well do you think Richland One is fulfilling its mission of educating students? *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Failing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Excelling

What are the top three issues that the school board needs to address and why? *

1. Fiscal Responsibility: I will ensure that our district's budget is managed prudently, focusing on eliminating wasteful spending and directing resources where they are most needed—our classrooms. It's essential that taxpayers' money is spent efficiently to enhance educational outcomes rather than being lost in bureaucratic inefficiencies.

2. Educational Excellence: I am committed to improving academic performance by setting high standards for our schools, supporting teachers with the resources they need, and ensuring a curriculum that prepares our students for the future. Every student deserves access to a quality education that equips them with the skills necessary to succeed.

3. Putting Kids First: Every decision made by the school board should prioritize the well-being and success of our students. Whether it's through safe and modern facilities, access to mental health resources, or promoting extracurricular activities, our kids must be at the center of our policies.

According to the most recent test results, only **23%** of 8th grade students met or exceeded math expectations and only **45%** met or exceeded English Language Arts (ELA) expectations. With so many of our students failing basic reading and math, it's no surprise that **39%** of Richland One high school graduates are not career or college ready. *

In light of these results, is the current superintendent meeting expectations? Please explain how he is or is not.

The recent test scores are unfortunate and serve as a clear reflection of our superintendent's leadership. From the beginning, I believed his hiring was a mistake, and the current situation reinforces why another school district deemed him unfit for their students. One important lesson I've learned in my leadership experience is that a leader must be accountable for both successes and failures.

Our superintendent has prioritized an overabundance of high and middle management while failing to deliver the necessary performance improvements. As a leader, it is crucial to embody the culture and climate of the organization. Unfortunately, many staff and teachers feel unsupported and fearful of their leadership, which is detrimental to our environment. This dynamic must change for the betterment of our students and staff.

Per the State Inspector General's report, Richland One "mismanaged" \$31 million related to the Vince Ford Early Learning Center. This mismanagement led the [State Superintendent](#) to elevate the district from "fiscal watch" to "fiscal caution." *

What would you recommend as the course of action for this particular project?

I believe that no decisions should be made until the community members living adjacent to the construction zone are compensated for any damages they have incurred. It is also crucial to ensure transparency regarding past decision-making processes and contract selections to prevent repeating mistakes and to help uncover any potential fraud or corruption. Once these steps have been addressed, we can engage in an informed and open discussion about the future of the site. Until then, I do not support allocating any further funds to the project.

As a school board member, will you pledge to: *

	Yes	No
make your decisions in an open and transparent manner that is compliant with FOIA laws?	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
govern by the established school board policies?	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
prioritize dollars going into the classrooms versus administrative overhead?	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
set measurable goals and expectations for the superintendent regarding student academic achievement?	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What kind of actions do you support to hold the superintendent accountable for meeting goals and expectations? *

From previous board meetings, it is clear that requesting metrics or setting goals is an unpopular opinion. This mindset must change. To hold the superintendent accountable, new standards need to be established. These standards should include metrics for teacher retention and vacancies, test scores, and student readiness for their post-graduation paths. Additionally, these standards should align with the district's strategic plan. If the superintendent fails to meet these new standards, appropriate actions should be taken to consider their replacement.

Is there anything else you want to share with GROW regarding your candidacy?

We are at a crisis point, and we cannot afford to continue down the same path. A new horizon is possible with the right leadership in place. Throughout this process, I have identified a team that is united in its commitment to moving the district forward, with a focus centered around the children we are entrusted to serve. I wholeheartedly endorse Richard Moore, Angela Brown, and Dr. Ericka Hursey. Together, this team and I would work to break the stalemate and bring the much-needed balance to the board.

This form was created inside of Watershed Consulting Group.

