

3 in GOP Brunswick school primary

Benton, Cruse will face incumbent John Thompson

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BRUNSWICK COUNTY — Two newcomers will face incumbent John Thompson for the Brunswick County Board of Education District 5 seat during the Republican primary.

Gerald Benton and Robert Cruse will face off against Thompson, who has served on the board since 2010. The seat holds a term of four years and the candidate who wins the Republican primary will face Democratic candidate Joanne Levitan in November during the regular election.

Board members earn \$15,720 annually, while the board chairman earns \$17,820 annually.

Early voting ends May 5 and Primary Election Day is May 8.

1) How can Brunswick County draw qualified teachers to the county, and retain them?

Benton: Brunswick County Schools can draw more qualified teachers to the county by having competitive compensation, encouraging lateral entry applicants, and accepting Troops to Teachers participants. The county could retain their teachers by incorporating a more positive mentoring system for teachers, monitoring teacher working conditions, reducing class size, and empowering administrators to remove disruptive students.

Cruse: I believe one of the issues with recruiting qualified teachers is making sure that we are offering a competitive wage, especially compared to surrounding counties. We also need to provide our teachers with a first-class work environment, an environment that makes them feel that they have 100% of the support of the county and the school board ... necessary teaching supplies, facilities that foster student learning and equipment that works and is up-to-date. In addition, we also need to provide teachers a way to progress upward through training, which will ensure that we are retaining our best teachers.

Thompson: Adopt clear goals and strategies for transitioning from a good school system to a great school system recognized as a leader in preparing highly qualified students for the future course they choose. Provide additional time in the school year through extension of employment time for professional development and

growth opportunities designed to support an effective, sharp focus in the classroom by the best prepared teachers.

2) What can the district do to help better prepare students for life after school?

Benton: In order to better prepare students for life after graduation, the district should provide vocational education, uphold diploma standards, and partner with Brunswick Community College. This partnership will provide more opportunities for students to earn an associate degree before graduation.

Cruse: The goal of the district is to make sure that our children leave the school system with a quality education. We begin this process by attracting and retaining the best qualified teachers. Making sure they are equipped with adequate resources to properly perform their duties and provide them with support to accomplish their duties. We also need to evaluate and reduce any administrative tasks that take away time from teaching students. We need to make sure that every minute and every dollar count.

Thompson: Integrate classroom learning across all subjects and electives similar to the successful pedagogy of the early college high school teaching model used across the U.S., i.e., a design-based education model that uses real world problem solving, creativity, collaboration and hands on learning to promote individual learning and group success.

3) What steps should the district take to remain competitive with the rising popularity of other schooling options for children?

Benton: In order to remain competitive with other school options the district needs to improve proficiency standards, implement common sense behavior policies, focus on data and proven instructional methods, offer more early college programs and establish a vocational tech school.

Cruse: Improve the public education that is being offered to our students. What is the number one reason parents choose to move their children out of the public schools and into private schools or charter schools? I believe it is to ensure their children are receiving a first-class education. Charter and private schools are competing for our children. To compete with these schooling options, we must offer a better education. We start by making sure we have the best qualified teachers and making sure that we are able to retain them.

Thompson: Every school or school system's measurement of success ultimately is how well its graduates are prepared for life-long learning in their career training, college or both. Our competition is most importantly focused in our schools by being the best we can be and having our graduates demonstrate readiness for career or college and success in their lives whatever they choose to do after graduation.

4) What do you foresee will be the most important issue or challenge facing the district?

Benton: The most important challenges facing the district include school safety, implementation of MTSS (Multi-Tier Support System), and establishing a trade school.

Cruse: Making sure that every dollar received by our school system is being used in the most effective way, which is improving the education that we are providing to our students. Funds available to our school system are limited, especially funds coming from the state. The state's funding went from 52.5% in 1970 to 39% for the 2017-2018 fiscal year. The state has consistently over time been pushing a larger financial responsibility to the county. State funding for N.C. has declined from 5th in the nation in 2007 to 10th in the nation for 2016.

Thompson: Transitioning from a traditional educational environment into a learning environment with modern pedagogy that prepares students for the rapidly changing world we live in. The transition requires planning, strategic professional development and a continuous effort to succeed by everyone. Political leadership, the community at-large including business and industry, parents, educators and students must be committed to the success and growth of our schools to meet the challenges of the future.

5) What goals do you have and hope to accomplish as a member of the school board?

Benton: I hope to accomplish the following goals: Establishing a trade school, ensuring student proficiency in reading and math upon graduation, ensure that graduates are employable, reduce classroom disruptions, improve school safety measures, and improve classroom teacher compensation.

Cruse: I want to better manage the funds that are received for our school system. We are already at a big disadvantage since N.C. spends the lowest per-pupil expenditures of any state. I hear it all the time that couples with children refuse to move to Brunswick County because of the school system. I want couples with young children to prefer moving into Brunswick County just because of our school system. We can make this happen and I guarantee you that if I am elected I will work harder than any board member in making sure that this becomes a reality.

Thompson: The district has to have leadership that shares a belief in the future of the district as a great school system. I will work for consensus and common purpose with a goal to build a school system that meets the needs of the community with students that can rise and flourish with the demands of today's world.

For more information and to see all candidate profiles, visit www.StarNewsOnline.com/news/politics.