



Alton School Board Candidates Introduce Themselves At Public Forum

by Dalton Brown, News Reporter
March 31 2023 11:00 AM

ALTON - The YWCA of Alton hosted a forum last week to allow the public to see and hear from the candidates running for the Alton School Board. Candidates introduced themselves and shared more about their backgrounds and experience at the forum, which was held on March 22.

Six total candidates are running for three four-year-term seats on the Board of Education in the upcoming April 4 election. Those candidates are as follows: Vivian Monckton, Jarvis Swope, Beverly Velloff, Alfred “Al” Womack Jr., David Fritz, and David Lauschke. Christina Milien is also running unopposed for a two-year term and did not attend the event.

Vivian Monckton, an incumbent member of the Alton School Board since 1999, was the first candidate to speak at the event. She said she’s proud of the work she and the School Board have accomplished so far and looks to continue that success if re-elected.

“I’m very proud of our school district and what we have to offer,” Monckton said. “We offer trade schools and vocational to honors classes, we have great sports, we have fine arts, and we all work together - the board, the teachers, the administration - we work hard to provide what we can for our students. We provide the best education that our community can support, and I’m very pleased with what we’ve done over the long term that I’ve been on the board.”

Jarvis Swope was the next candidate to introduce themselves. He said he’s a 2005 AHS graduate and currently works as the Technology Director for the City of Alton, and also works “part-time in law enforcement.” He said he’s running for the school board to “make a change.”

“I am running for school board to first make a change in the ISBE report card. I don’t like the numbers, the expulsion rates for out-of-school suspension of children for Black students is too high,” Swope said. “I was adopted when I was a child, so I grew up with an African-American family. I truly believe that those young students deserve just as much help as the white students - we’re all created equal, and according to the report card, we’re missing something.”

Swope added that he’d also like to create a program for the parents of district students to educate them on the effects of social media on children.

“Our children do not need to be on social media,” he said. “It’s toxic, it affects their behavior, it affects their attitude, affects their learning, and so on.”

Next up was Al Womack, Jr., a lifelong Alton resident and AHS graduate. He said he’s running for the school board to be an advocate for children and make changes he believes are necessary.

“My concern is, we went right back to doing what we were doing before the pandemic, and the effects are we’re seeing kids with more mental health issues, we’re seeing poor attendance, and kids aren’t learning - and we’ve done nothing,” Womack said. “The scores and the numbers are showing that we are failing our kids, so I want to be sitting at the table as we talk about a plan to improve the opportunities and the education for our kids.”

Womack added that he also plans to advocate for teachers in the district and wants to raise their pay to help retain teachers and keep Alton schools competitive.

“I think our school district is one of the lower-paying school districts in the area, and we’re losing teachers. So if we want to retain teachers and offer a high-quality education to our kids, we have to pay them a little bit more,” he said. “We have to be competitive so that we don’t lose them to surrounding communities.”

Beverly Velloff was the next candidate to take the podium. She said her family has lived in Middletown since 2003 and her husband Michael served as Ward 3 Alderman on the Alton City Council for 12 years. Velloff herself is currently the District-Level Curriculum Coordinator for the school district of University City in St. Louis.

Prior to being an administrator, she also worked as a math coach, math specialist, classroom teacher, and regional professional development coordinator. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Elementary Education and a Master’s in Education with an emphasis on curriculum and instruction.

“I’ve been a public school educator for more than 25 years. I’m very aware of the challenges and triumphs that our students and public schools face,” Velloff said. “As a member of this community for more than 20 years and a mom of two Alton High School students, I am seeking a position on the Board of Education because I truly believe in the public school system and I believe that our school board should have a wide range of backgrounds represented, including an educator like myself.”

Candidate David Fritz introduced himself next as a lifelong resident of the Alton-Godfrey area who graduated from Alton Senior High School in 1981. He worked as a banker for Wedge Bank in Alton and currently works at Piasa Motor Fuels, and he and his wife volunteer for Alton Band & Orchestra Builders (ABOB). He said he’s proud of the current administration’s accomplishments, including “the best contract offer” Alton teachers have received so far.

“We have worked hard to give our teachers a very good contract for the first time in my wife’s career - probably the best contract offer they’ve had,” Fritz said. “a life of service, a life of working with a team, and willing and very much wanting to continue that for the next four years.”

David Lauschke was the final candidate to introduce themselves - candidates spoke in the order they appear on the ballot. He said he’s “essentially” a lifelong Alton resident and has been involved with the school board for several years.

“It’s one of those things that I’m passionate about; I think the school district is a vital component to the success of this community,” Lauschke said. “I bring some background with finance, I like to push, I ask questions ... if I didn’t think that I could bring something to the school district as a board member, I wouldn’t be running.”

A full recording of the Alton YWCA school board candidate forum can be watched at the top of this story or on [Riverbender.com/video](https://riverbender.com/video).