



Questions Answered At Alton School Board Candidates Forum

by Dalton Brown, News Reporter
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ALTON - Each of the contested candidates running for seats on the Alton School Board answered questions at a public forum hosted by the Alton YWCA 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.

Candidates were asked how they felt about changing curriculum to re-write or “whitewash” Black history or other ethnic histories. David Lauschke was asked to answer first and said he didn’t understand where the question was coming from, but that “history is history.”

“History is history, and if it’s bad or it’s good, we have to discuss it,” Lauschke said. “I don’t know why you would want to whitewash it, period.”

Vivian Monckton agreed that history should be taught regardless of whether it’s good or bad and said: “I can’t change history, and so I would not dare to say that I’m going to demean it, change it, alter it. Learn from it, teach it, move forward.”

Al Womack, Jr. agreed with the prior candidates that all history should still be taught, but it’s also important to consider the perspectives of all cultures so that “every young person can appreciate where they come from and what they come from.” Beverly Velloff agreed and added that it’s important to make sure students of all cultures feel “seen” and represented in the classroom. David Fritz also agreed that “all history should be taught, without bias.”

Candidates were also asked, “Does the school district look at discipline and academic achievement by race, do you think they should, and why or why not?” Womack was asked to answer first and started by saying he didn’t think they should, as he supports equitable policies.

“Race should not play a factor in there - unfortunately, when you look at the data, there are huge disparities when it comes to race, academics, and discipline,” Womack said. “I still think that goes back to the training to eliminate some biases and fears when it comes to kids of different backgrounds.”

Velloff answered the same question next and said she thought it was important to “break it down” to further analyze the data and make sure discipline procedures are being followed equitably.

Fritz said it’s important to have a structure of discipline and that the district administration does not look at race. Monckton agreed and said the district focuses instead on individual student behavior.

“We don’t look at race - at least, these eyes don’t look at race,” Fritz said. “We look at the student and what happened, what the case was, and how it affected the learning prospects at the school.”

Jarvis Swope said the district should analyze the data by race to help find solutions to problems, citing a statistic that 66% of expelled Alton students were Black compared to 28% of them being white. David Lauschke said that while he prefers to look at it as “all of the kids” rather than by race, he does think they should be aware of any discrepancies.

Candidates were also asked what they thought parents’ roles should be in their children’s education. Monckton was asked to answer first and said parents are actually the first educator in a child’s life.

“Education starts with the birth of your child. A parent is the first educator of your children, and parents teach in conjunction with the teachers,” Monckton said. “Teachers need the cooperation of the family at home. So much of what happens at school coincides with what happens at home.”

Monckton and Swope both said parents should also be sure to ask their children how their school day was, whether they have homework, and just generally check on and provide for their children. Womack said that “a child that is only educated at school is an uneducated child.”

Velloff said that parents' role should be to "partner" with the school system, and the school system should be a partner to parents in return. She added that "it's important that parents ask us questions on a regular basis."

Fritz said the question should be broadened to reflect the fact some Alton students don't have the "luxury" of having both parents - or even one parent - in their life, adding that some students are taught/looked after by older siblings. He emphasized the importance of programs and mentoring services to offer those students support.

Lauschke said parents are "one of the most vital components to a child's education," but that children are only as interested in education as their parents are in promoting it to them.

A full recording of the Alton YMCA school board candidate forum, including more questions and answers, can be watched at the top of this story or on [Riverbender.com /video](https://www.riverbender.com/video).

