

# WHERE THEY STAND

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On Nov. 4, voters in the Edinburgh school district will pick representatives for school board.



Reporter Sarah Michalos interviewed the candidates on a wide range of issues. Voters have a right to know where the candidates stand on the issues. Use this page as a guide to help you make your voting decision. Go to dailyjournal.net for more questions and answers.

## Edinburgh school board

Town of Edinburgh seats (pick two)

Election Day: Nov. 4 ■ Voting hours: 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.



ROBERT BURTON



CATHY HAMM



ALICE TAULMAN



**Issues**  
What are the three biggest issues facing your school district? How will you address them?

**Burton**

Enrollment, students and participation in extracurricular activities. Isn't sure how he would address the issues.

**Hamm**

Funding, student enrollment and test scores. There is really no direct way to address a funding issue, all state and tax dollar-supported. With state taking over general budget, there is a lot of uncertainty. With possibility of declining enrollment, it affects how much money district gets. Addressing student enrollment is difficult, but board recently passed a policy that should attract students on fringe of district. Edinburgh is landlocked; the only growth would be to go to north of town. Need more affordable housing for young families so children join district. Test scores are low, but they are working as early as kindergarten to boost scores. Wants to continue having small classes, so students can get individual attention. Also wants to continue having (Advanced Placement) classes for high school students.

**Taulman**

Test scores, graduation rate and rigor. As a school board member, she doesn't think she can fix issues but said she wants to improve them. Teachers are the most important group in the school district, and they have to work with students outside of class to raise test scores and the graduation rates. "Everyone learns the same thing, but if you don't get it, stay after class, before class or during a study hall."



**Lesson plan**  
Teachers are on the front lines of learning. What type of teachers do you want your school district to hire, and how do you measure their performance? What should be done if they are not performing adequately? What role does a school board member have in hiring teachers?

**Burton**

Wants to hire teachers who put the students first. Would rely on the superintendent to measure the teachers' performance and report back to the school board. Superintendent should address problems of teachers not performing adequately. Concerns about inadequate performance also should be brought to the board. Superintendent recommends teachers to the school board members for hire.

**Hamm**

Teachers who are qualified and who are teaching in their subject field. Wants teachers who are motivated, caring and student-centered. Would measure performance through evaluations at an administrative level. If teachers are not performing adequately, there are procedures and protocol to go through that is laid out in performance evaluations. Administrators work with teachers and bring their recommendation to board. School board members vote on recommendations presented by superintendent on which teachers to hire.

**Taulman**

Wants to hire teachers who expect a lot from students and who are willing to do innovative things to get what they want from students. The way to measure teacher performance is by looking at how students' grades and test scores improve throughout the school year. Need to have in-service programs to show teachers how to use technology and improve learning. Should talk to teachers if they aren't performing adequately and see what is causing the problem. School board members approve what the superintendent tells them in terms of hiring teachers. Members should trust the superintendent's judgment because they are the one who hired him or her.



**A+**  
What is the most important thing you can do as a school board member to improve student achievement?

**Burton**

Encourage students. Parents should get involved with their students.

**Hamm**

Be supportive of administrators and their guidance and selection decisions.

**Taulman**

Encourage students to be lifelong learners by providing resources for teachers and administration. Since school board members aren't in the classroom, they need to provide financial support and resources to the teachers.



**Speech bubbles**  
What policy do you favor for public comment at school board meetings? What restrictions would you impose?

**Burton**

Doesn't favor bringing problems to the school board meeting, but people should go to the superintendent. Encourages public comments at school board meetings. Isn't sure what restrictions he would impose.

**Hamm**

Favors the current policy, where at beginning people can comment on agenda items. At the end, people should be given a chance to comment on anything discussed during meeting or anything else. It's important to allow time for public to speak. Restrictions would be that personnel issues not be discussed, such as comments about a teacher. Comments about personnel are not appropriate for school board meetings.

**Taulman**

Favors the current policy at Edinburgh board meetings, where members of the public are able to comment before and after meetings. Only restriction would be that if the public starts to personally attack someone, the board president or superintendent should step in and suggest a private conversation at a different time.



**LAW**  
How do you interpret Indiana's Open Door Law? Will you follow the letter and spirit of the Open Door Law?

**Burton**

He interprets the law as requiring the school board to have public meetings. Yes, would follow the law.

**Hamm**

Interprets law as having meetings that are open to the public. No decisions regarding school should be made in a setting that isn't a school board meeting. Will follow letter and spirit of the law.

**Taulman**

Interprets it as the right for the public to attend meetings and know about the issues. It's important to follow the law so that people can be heard.



**Open book**  
Do you favor adding any academic, sports or extracurricular programs? Why or why not? What curriculum changes would you suggest?

**Burton**

Isn't sure he would add any academics. There aren't enough students who participate in the sports the district currently offers, so is not in favor of adding any sports. The district is in the process of adding extracurricular activities; supports that. Isn't sure what curriculum changes he would suggest.

**Hamm**

Favors adding academics programs, such as more (Advanced Placement) courses and courses that will give students college credit. Would support adding any extracurricular activities if enough students interested. Same with sports, would want to make sure it would not take away from another program. Would look at financial burden. Would not suggest curriculum changes, would support curriculum changes that came from administration.

**Taulman**

Favors adding academic programs. Having options for high school students to take classes for college credit is a necessity. Favors a change to have teachers of different subjects collaborate so students see the relation between them. Combine social studies and English and then math and science so students can see the relevance of each subject.



**Line graph**  
Schools are giving students ISTEP and other tests to measure achievement. What measures will you use to monitor if students in your school are being adequately educated and prepared for college or the working world?

**Burton**

If elected, would visit classrooms and talk to teachers and principals. It's the responsibility of the superintendent to make sure students are monitored.

**Hamm**


Test scores are one way to monitor what knowledge student has learned, and they are a key element. Would also look at a student's grades, and take graduation rates into account. Another source is number of students attending vocational classes, which prepare them for field they want to work in.


**Taulman**


Opposes more testing. The decision on how to monitor students should come from the administration.





**WEB EXTRA:** Go to the election section at dailyjournal.net for more questions and answers.


<p><b>Burton</b></p>  <p>How will you learn what people in the school district think about the issues? When you make a decision, will you make it based on what you believe is best or what your constituents say is best?</p> <p>Would go into the community and get input from the constituents, because they are the taxpayers. Would take into consideration what the community and the students think when making a decision.</p>	<p><b>Hamm</b></p> <p>People in the district will let her know what they think about issues. Residents can voice their opinions to her out in the community. Decisions are based on information and knowledge. Decisions can't be made solely on what she thinks is right or wrong, or solely on what constituents think is right or wrong.</p>	<p><b>Taulman</b></p> <p>Talks to members of the community when she walks her dogs around town. People come up to her and tell her what they think about the school board's decisions. Bases her decisions on what she thinks and also takes input from the community into consideration.</p>
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<p><b>Burton</b></p>  <p>School board members often spend much of their time dealing with construction, dress code policies and other issues. How can you better address and examine important issues such as student achievement and curriculum at board meetings?</p> <p>Isn't sure.</p>	<p><b>Hamm</b></p> <p>Important issues, such as student achievement and curriculum, should be placed on agenda so board members can have a discussion.</p>	<p><b>Taulman</b></p> <p>Ask to see test results. Would ask teachers and administration what is being done to improve test scores and what they need from the school board members to help meet that goal. School board members' role is to help teachers and students succeed.</p>
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<p><b>Burton</b></p>  <p>If funding became so tight that programs would need to be cut, how would you decide? What would be a priority?</p> <p>Doesn't have a priority. Would need to talk to other school board members and the superintendent to see what would be cut.</p>	<p><b>Hamm</b></p> <p>If programs needed to be cut due to funding, would look at participation in the programs. School board members would look into recommendations from administration and research options. Academics are priority, and any program that reflects that should be kept.</p>	<p><b>Taulman</b></p> <p>Would never cut academics. "I have seen that, through education, people can have better lives." Athletics and extracurricular activities are a nice supplement but aren't necessary. Would discuss any cuts with other school board members and people in the community first.</p>
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<p><b>Burton</b></p>  <p>What are your qualifications/experience to govern a multimillion-dollar school corporation?</p> <p>Has lived in and around Edinburgh his whole life. He, his wife and kids attended the high school. Was an Edinburgh school bus driver for 11 years before he retired, so has a good relationship with students.</p>	<p><b>Hamm</b></p> <p>Is serving third term on Edinburgh school board, and had experience working with budgets. Is director of public library in Edinburgh and also does budgeting there.</p>	<p><b>Taulman</b></p> <p>Has been an educator for 45 years and has seen what works and what doesn't work. Has been a student, teacher, counselor and a school board member. Has taught the seventh grade through college-level classes.</p>
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<p><b>Burton</b></p>  <p>What programs should schools have for non-English speaking students?</p> <p>The district should have tutoring programs for students so they can learn English quickly.</p>	<p><b>Hamm</b></p> <p>The district should work to meet needs of non-English speaking students, to allow them to learn English language and fit into other classes. Isn't sure if an actual program is needed, but would make sure the students are given the attention they need.</p>	<p><b>Taulman</b></p> <p>Resources should be put into teaching children how to speak English, not into translating material into their native language. Should be assessed on an individual basis, depending on each student's needs.</p>
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<p><b>Burton</b></p>  <p>Let's say a parent comes to you with a complaint about a teacher, coach or principal. What would you do?</p> <p>Would tell the parent to talk to the superintendent. The superintendent is employed to run the school corporation and mediate problems.</p>	<p><b>Hamm</b></p> <p>Would listen to parent. Every concern or complaint is important. Would tell parent there is a chain of command and review chain with him or her. Would tell parent to come back to her if they had followed the chain of command and didn't resolve the problem.</p>	<p><b>Taulman</b></p> <p>Would go through the chain of command, starting with the teacher. Next would be going to the principal, the superintendent and then the school board.</p>
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<p><b>Burton</b></p>  <p>What is your understanding of the role of a board member vs. the role of paid, professional administrators?</p> <p>Board members' job is to hire the superintendent, set a budget and monitor building projects. Principals of each school work for the superintendent and follow a chain of command.</p>	<p><b>Hamm</b></p> <p>Board members' role is to set policy and see that policy is carried out. Professional administrators run the schools and corporation and oversee operations to make sure all needs are met.</p>	<p><b>Taulman</b></p> <p>Board members are policy makers. The job of board members is to enforce the policies and work with administrators. Administrators are there to enforce policies and assist board members in giving us information concerning what's going on around the school. Administrators keep the board members informed.</p>
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<p><b>Burton</b></p>  <p>How should the school district ensure that all adults who interact with children, be it as a coach, chaperone or other volunteer, are acceptable role models? What steps do you take, beyond performing background checks, to ensure that adults involved in the school district are setting the right example for youth?</p> <p>Would attend sporting events or other events and observe how the adults interact with the children. Before a person is hired, would look at their résumé and take the superintendent's advice on whether or not to hire a person.</p>	<p><b>Hamm</b></p> <p>It's not the job of a school board member to pick and choose who will be a chaperone, volunteer and coach. The selection of those people should be taken care of at the building level. Teachers, principals, athletics department staff members and administrators will know which people are good to bring on a field trip or to work with the students. Board members need to make sure background checks are done and a person has a clean background. Board approves recommendations.</p>	<p><b>Taulman</b></p> <p>Need to watch the person as they interact with children. First, would rely on a background check and would talk to references before hiring someone. Have to trust your instincts and then closely watch the person perform once they are hired.</p>
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<p><b>Burton</b></p>  <p>Administrators across the county say that the number of students dropping out of schools is an issue that must be addressed. What methods would you propose to keep students in school or bring back students who have dropped out?</p> <p>Getting students involved in extracurricular activities, such as sports, will keep them in school. District is in the process of getting an alternative school and thinks it will give at-risk students a better opportunity to get an education. Doesn't know how to bring back students who have already dropped out.</p>	<p><b>Hamm</b></p> <p>A method to keep students in school is to encourage them to attend alternative school. To keep students in school, teachers should work one-on-one with them. Use knowledge from superintendent or guidance counselor to find out why student is not coming to school, to find underlying problem and see if district can help. For students who have already dropped out, make sure they know of all opportunities available to finish their education, such as getting their GED.</p>	<p><b>Taulman</b></p> <p>Edinburgh is sending students to an alternative school, wants that to continue. Need to offer different options to students, such as online classes. Need to show students that dropping out has a lot of consequences. For students who have dropped out, would either encourage them to come back to school, get their GED or go to Ivy Tech Community College and get a two-year degree.</p>
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## Burton



Isn't sure at this point.

SAT scores for high school students in Johnson County are below the state average. What changes to curriculum or teaching methods would you propose to boost the students' scores?

## Hamm

Following state standards in classroom curriculum and offering (Advanced Placement) classes for students so they can learn at higher level than state standards.

## Taulman

Need more rigorous graduation requirements. Need to encourage students to take classes for college credit and challenge themselves. Doesn't think Indiana is keeping up with other states in terms of getting students involved and excited about education. Also need to start earlier to prepare students for testing, as early as second grade.

## Burton



More one-on-one contact between students and their teachers or principal.

What is the single most significant element contributing to the success of a school system in educating its students?

## Hamm

Teachers. They are in forefront of education and are the ones who are with students day in and day out.

## Taulman

Rigor and relevance of the subjects. Students have to see how what they're learning is relevant to their lives.

## Burton



Yes. The public should know about what the district spends.

With the change in the property tax system, schools' operating expenses will be funded with taxpayer money that's filtered through the state, rather than local property tax dollars. Should all money the school district spends, such as grants, state tax dollars, fees and local property tax dollars, be open to the same level of scrutiny by the public? Why or why not?

## Hamm

No. Grant dollars should not be scrutinized, because they're spent for what grant was written for. As for local property tax dollars, public has opportunity to scrutinize how they are spent during annual budget hearing. The taxpayers are informed about when the hearing is.

## Taulman

Yes, to show they are used properly and for what they were intended for. Everything should be open to the public, and school board members should be held accountable for the way they spend money, whether it is a grant or tax dollars.

## Burton



Yes, does support selling naming rights. Is a way to raise money for the district.

Do you favor selling naming rights to parts of schools, classrooms, scoreboards or buildings? Why or why not?

## Hamm

Yes. Would be in favor of naming rights as long as it meets criteria of administrators. Naming rights can save school dollars. Would make sure it was tactfully done.

## Taulman

Yes. Is in favor of any money that can be put into education, curriculum and teacher pay. Coursework is more important than building scoreboards and football fields.

## Burton



For any type of sports that they have teams for, a facility is needed. District needs gymnasiums for basketball, baseball diamond and football field.

What types of athletics facilities are necessary for your school district? What is not needed?

## Hamm

Need facilities to support any athletics program the district has. They don't have a softball field, but use the town's softball field. Building a softball diamond is in the district's long-term plan. Every facility the district has is needed.

## Taulman

Thinks the athletics facilities are adequate. Don't think we should add anything or take anything away.

## Burton



Hasn't researched the property tax caps and can't answer the question.

When property tax caps kick in next year, all local governments will be allowed only so much money. School districts have for years been the biggest tax burden for property owners. How will the school district work with other local governments to decide who will spend what, especially when building projects are necessary?

## Hamm

Will work with other entities through communication and awareness. Before building projects occur, need to know what else is going on in community. Would need to know the assessed value and what can be afforded throughout community.

## Taulman

Collaboration. School district should work with city and town boards to see what projects need funding. Doesn't anticipate that Edinburgh will need any more buildings in the near future, but said education and students' needs should be a priority.

## Burton



Can't answer the question.

Local governments, including schools, cities, towns and the county, are expected to lose more than \$7 million when the property tax caps are phased in. How can schools start preparing now to handle the loss of tax money? What can be cut?

## Hamm

Schools should start preparing now by looking to future. When teachers retire, see if there need to replace that teacher, or if school can still work as efficiently without replacing teacher. Would look at fuel costs, how can they be reduced? District needs to be more fiscally responsible, and make sure they spend money on necessities, not luxuries.

## Taulman

Doesn't want to make a decision on how to prepare until the district knows exactly how much it will lose. Won't cut teachers or anything that involves students' education. Extracurricular activities could be cut, said that people from the community would come forward and help supplement education.

## Burton



No, is not in favor of consolidation. But if enrollment keeps dropping, consolidation could be where the district is headed. Isn't sure of any other ways to consolidate with local governments.

State officials have discussed different ideas for consolidating local government, such as combining school districts of a small size. Would you be in favor of this plan? What other ways could schools consolidate with other governments to save taxpayer money?

## Hamm

Yes, as long as specific guidelines were met where it would increase district's student population, but wouldn't lose its autonomy. Would want to continue to keep and maintain district's buildings and keep student-teacher ratio low. Need to maintain structure of corporation as it is. Another way to save taxpayer money would be to share facilities, such as allowing parks and recreation to use gyms, and letting schools use softball diamond.

## Taulman

Isn't sure. Doesn't see consolidation as a bad thing. Favors creating magnet schools. Combining school districts would allow students to have more course offerings. Doesn't know of other ways schools could consolidate with other governments.

## Burton



The alternative school could keep kids in school who are on the verge of dropping out. Isn't sure that the alternative school will bring students back in who have already dropped out, but it could.

Edinburgh's graduation rate is the lowest in the county. How would you work to increase graduation rates and decrease the number of students who drop out? What programs would you work to put in place? How do you get students who dropped out back into the classroom?

## Hamm

Would refer students to alternative school, which will keep at-risk students in school by offering them a different scenario for learning. Individual attention to all students is necessary, but would make sure at-risk students are counseled on ways to make them successful. For students who have already dropped out, would make sure they are given direction of where to go next, such as how to get GEDs. The alternative school will be open to students who recently dropped out and who are a few credits shy of graduating.

## Taulman

Teachers need to work with students as early as possible, especially students that are at risk for dropping out. Need to figure out how students learn and at what speed and put things in place to cater to their learning styles. Doesn't think that school board members are able to implement programs, but would advocate working with students on an individual basis. With students who have dropped out, would try to bring them back in if they only have a couple of credits left. If they dropped out early in high school, would encourage them to get GEDS or enroll in Ivy Tech.