

# Carteret County News-Times Election Guide: Primaries 2016

## Democratic and Republican race for NC Superintendent of Public Schools

### JUNE ATKINSON (D)



**Age:** 67  
**Hometown and current residence:** Bedford, Va., and currently Raleigh.  
**Education and occupation:** Doctorate in education leadership and policy, N.C. State University; master's in vocational and technical education, Virginia Tech; B.S. in business education, Radford University; and honorary doctorate, Campbell University. Former business teacher at the high school and community college levels, educational administrator and currently, state superintendent of public instruction.

**Political experience:** Elected as superintendent of public instruction in 2004, 2008 and 2012.

### HENRY J. PANKEY (D)



**Age:** 64  
**Hometown and current residence:** Laurinburg and Durham  
**Education and occupation:** M.A., University of Maryland; Brooklyn College graduate diploma of supervision and administration; and B.F.A., UNC-Chapel Hill School of the Arts. Currently assistant principal with Winston-Salem Forsyth County School System since 2005.

**Political experience:** Active in the N.C. Association of Educators.

### MARK JOHNSON (R)



**Age:** 32  
**Hometown and current residence:** Winston-Salem  
**Education and occupation:** Undergraduate from Emory University and UNC-Chapel Hill School of Law. Currently in-house lawyer for a technology company.

**Political experience:** Elected school board member for the Winston-Salem Forsyth school system, one of the largest in North Carolina.

### ROSEMARY STEIN, M.D. (R)



**Age:** 51  
**Hometown and current residence:** Snow Cap  
**Political experience:** I am a pediatrician, not a politician. I do not feel that being a politician should be a career choice. I have served extensively on volunteer boards. I was a trustee of Alamance Community College for six (years) and was chairman of the curriculum committee of the North Carolina Partnership for Children (Smart Start). I also sit on the Minority Health Advisory Committee for North Carolina.

### J. WESLEY SILLS (R)



**Age:** 34  
**Hometown and current residence:** Dunn  
**Education and occupation:** B.A. in political science and several secondary education classes at UNC-Wilmington, May 2004. Currently a high school civics and economic teacher, August 2012-present.

**Political experience:** Volunteer in Harnett County GOP as a teenager, volunteer in New Hanover County GOP as a college student and former chairman of the Harnett County GOP (resigned due to primary in election.)

#### JUNE ATKINSON

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#### Why are you a standout candidate to oversee our public school system?

My work as state superintendent has resulted in many positive results for North Carolina's children. When I was first elected as state superintendent, our high school graduation rate was 68 percent. Last school year, we reached an all-time high of nearly 86 percent. Over 35 percent of the high school class of 2015 graduated with college credit – a savings to parents, taxpayers and students – as a result of my work with the General Assembly, community college system and other partners. More third graders are reading well.

#### Please identify a few ways we can improve public school for all students during often tumultuous budget cycles.

Make an investment in the educator workforce by increasing teacher salaries, developing opportunities for teacher leadership and providing professional development for educators to keep up to date.

Change our testing and accountability system now that the U.S. Congress has passed the "Every Student Succeeds Act" that gives greater flexibility to states and the General Assembly to determine North Carolina's public school destiny.

Continue to carry out the North Carolina technology plan that has been funded, in part, by the General Assembly.

Invest in quality pre-school programs for our most vulnerable children.

Continue to focus on each child reading well by the end of third grade.

#### Are you in favor of funding teacher assistant positions statewide in elementary grades? Why or why not?

Yes, I am in favor of teacher assistant positions for K-3 classrooms. I have visited hundreds of North Carolina elementary classes where I have seen firsthand the value of teacher assistants. They assist students in becoming better readers. They help students who become ill and have to leave the classroom. They assist students with special needs. They enable teachers to give extra help and assistance to struggling students.

#### How can the state better balance public school resources and resources for charter schools?

As required by North Carolina state law, all charter schools are a part of the public school system. Consequently, state laws require that all dollars and educator positions appropriated to local school district public schools are also appropriated to public charter schools ... How resources are balanced between public charter schools and local school district schools is a General Assembly decision.

\*This submission was trimmed for space.

#### Why are you a standout candidate to oversee our public school system?

I have 40 years of nationally acclaimed professional school improvement expertise. As the recipient of over 100 awards, my passionate commitment continues to grow infinitely stronger.

Outstanding achievements include: extraordinary local, state and national school improvement records validated by DPI and news outlets; received over 100 awards for my work with administrators, teachers, counselors, staff, students and community-based organizations; passionate and dedicated to the improvement of public schools; determined to turn around all N.C.'s 500+ low performing schools; fully supports the NCAE and was 2012 state assistance principal of the year; national school improvement consultant and motivational speaker; retired principal, but has been working for Winston-Salem Forsyth County School as an assistant principal since 2005.

#### Please identify a few ways we can improve public school for all students during often tumultuous budget cycles.

Remove Common Core and bring back common sense.

#### Are you in favor of funding teacher assistant positions statewide in elementary grades? Why or why not?

Teacher assistance in K-12 grades is essential to the academic enhancement of low performing students, ESL pupils, individuals with learning disabilities and behavior problems, improving reading and math comprehension, as well as the overall achievement of all children.

#### How can the state better balance public school resources and resources for charter schools?

We need to review how we are using current money and resources in public and charter schools, as well as holding each to the same standards.

#### Why are you a standout candidate to oversee our public school system?

I'm a former teacher. I'm an elected, local education official and I'm a father. I've experienced all aspects of the education challenges we face in N.C. and none of the other Republicans share that firsthand experience.

#### Please identify a few ways we can improve public school for all students during often tumultuous budget cycles.

Teachers NOT testing! We must reform the burdensome system of over-testing created by the incumbent.

21<sup>st</sup> century preparation! We must increase the smart, measured implementation of technology in all classrooms.

Trust locals NOT bureaucrats! We must have greater support for local education leaders instead of the one-size-fits-all approach from Raleigh by revamping N.C. professional development for educators.

#### Are you in favor of funding teacher assistant positions statewide in elementary grades? Why or why not?

I think every school district is different. Your question falls into the trap of "one-size-fits-all" approach taken by Raleigh for too long. We need to give local districts more control of their funding rather than attaching strings. Some might want to use that funding for teacher assistants and others might have other needs. For example, what if we allow local education leaders to use that funding for worthwhile professional development to train reading coaches for the students? Some counties might need that resource more if we are going to hit our goal of all third graders reading at grade level.

#### How can the state better balance public school resources and resources for charter schools?

Most charter schools are a blessing for their students. However, if a charter school is not hitting its marks, it should be held accountable just like we should hold public schools accountable.

#### Why are you a standout candidate to oversee our public school system?

I am the only candidate who is committed to removing Common Core from North Carolina schools. Common Core was initially stated as a common set of minimum standards for all children in America. Unfortunately, it was transformed into a curriculum that does not match the development of the child's brain. To use an analogy, Common Core builds the roof of the house before it clears the ground and lays the foundation. This sets our children up to receive a failing education. It is my intention to replace Common Core with classical education. North Carolina children will return to learning to read with phonics. Phonics has been proven superior to the block/sight word reading method. Our children will also return to the time-tested method to learn math that all older North Carolinians were taught. No parent should have to take a class to help their child or grandchild with second grade math.

I was born in New York to legal immigrant Dominican parents. My first language was Spanish. When I went to first grade, I did not know English and was immediately immersed. Children at that age easily learn languages, as we all know. I was immersed two other times in two other countries so that now I am fluent in three languages. If elected, I will work to change North Carolina English as a second language program to one that is immersion-based. This will decrease time spent learning English. It will allow these children to remain in class so that they do not miss the important lessons of reading and math, and it will ensure that they have the best possible chance to graduate.

For too long, candidates for superintendent have focused on the administration of the Department of Public Instruction. I am concerned about the product that the department is producing. That product should be excellent, developmentally sound education that matches the child's ability to learn at certain ages. Being an excellent administrator of a company that produces a bad product is not my goal in running for superintendent.

Each North Carolina child deserves a first class education!

\*Ms. Stein declined to answer the other questions included in our survey.

#### Why are you a standout candidate to oversee our public school system?

I am the only current classroom teacher on the ballot. I see daily what works and does not work for our students. I see policies from DPI that do not work and do not help students learn. I live daily the one-size-fits-all approach to public education we have and how that is failing our students. Low-performing students do not receive the help they need and high-achieving students do not receive challenges that benefit them. I have common sense solutions, not Common Core problems, to make our public education system student-centered.

#### Please identify a few ways we can improve public school for all students during often tumultuous budget cycles.

We must return to student-centered instruction. We need to scrap our one-size-fits-all approach and tailor our classes to meet our students. We must stop forcing students who are not college bound to take irrelevant classes. We need to go back to teaching study skills in middle school, we need to encourage more vocational training in high school to include high-tech manufacturing trades and agri-science, and we need to stop testing as much as we do in all grade levels. These common sense and business-friendly ideas are not expensive. It just requires Republican leadership.

#### Are you in favor of funding teacher assistant positions statewide in elementary grades? Why or why not?

I am in favor and want to expand the role of teacher assistants in elementary grades. I want teacher assistants to have skills, training and financial incentives to further assist the teacher in teaching reading and other literacy skills to students who need extra help. Too many students enter kindergarten unprepared for various reasons, mostly related to low socio-economic home life. We cannot brush these kids aside when it is not their fault of the home life they have. We must do what is necessary to get these kids to grade level reading.

#### How can the state better balance public school resources and resources for charter schools?

Charter schools are public schools, but my platform focuses on reforming traditional public schools. My platform calls for doing what is necessary to fix our broken traditional public school system. If my plans are implemented in their entirety, traditional public schools will be parents' first choice. I am the product of traditional public education and my family, including my late mother, taught at traditional public schools. I currently teach at a traditional public school.