

Restore the Balance
Report to the School District 51 Electorate
School Board Candidate Questionnaire Process and Results
October 6, 2025

Restore the Balance (RTB) is a nonpartisan group of citizens who have united to oppose extremism and help restore issues-based civil discourse to our politics. More than 2,900 individuals have endorsed our pledge setting forth eight principles that serve this goal.

As it has done for all local elections since 2022, RTB sent questionnaires to all the candidates in all races. This report covers questionnaires to six candidates for three seats on the Mesa County Valley School District 51. The RTB questionnaire was formulated to learn the following from each candidate:

- Their qualifications and experience to serve as a BOE member
- Their thoughts on specific issues currently facing District 51
- Their thoughts on governance matters that District 51 faces
- Their commitment to the eight RTB principles to govern political conduct and speech

Readers may wish to review Attachment 1—SD51 Candidate Questionnaire Rubric, which groups the responses into the four categories listed above, to get an initial idea of the information the questionnaire sought as they read the Report. The responses to each of the ten questions were scored using a ten-point scale. A zero was assigned when a candidate did not answer a question.

Registered voters who live within school district limits may vote on all candidates seeking office.

The following candidates received questionnaires:

- District C: Andrea Haitz and Mike Rathbone
- District D: Kaci Cole and Will Jones
- District E: Angela Lema and Vicki Woods

Three of the six candidates responded to the questionnaire. The candidates' responses were evaluated by a bipartisan committee and scores were assigned. The RTB Board of Directors reviewed and approved the committee's work. Each candidate's completed questionnaire, along with the report and scoring are posted on the RTB website (www.restorethebalance.org).

The following candidates have completed the questionnaire and endorsed the RTB principles:

- District C: Mike Rathbone
- District D: Kaci Cole
- District E: Vicki Woods

Included below are brief summaries by the Committee on the numerical scores that the candidates earned for their responses to the RTB candidate questionnaires. There are three important caveats for readers to bear in mind:

- 1.) The committee's work is based on a candidate's written responses to an emailed questionnaire

rather than live interviews; thus, its opportunities to probe answers or ask questions were limited.

- 2.) When committee members had personal knowledge of a candidate in addition to the questionnaire answers that were provided by the candidate, that knowledge was taken into account.
- 3.) Voters are strongly encouraged to review the questionnaires and answers of each candidate in their entirety and draw their own conclusions. These may be found at the RTB website. RTB scoring should not be a substitute for voters' personal involvement and decision-making. We strongly recommend that voters attend any upcoming candidate forums.

Mike Rathbone, Jr. - District C

Mike Rathbone, Jr. might be a breath of fresh air as a School Board candidate. He's a 2010 Central HS graduate, a retired Army combat infantry veteran, and a volunteer hockey coach in Grand Junction. He and his fiancée have four school-aged children, two enrolled in charter schools and two in District 51 schools.

Mr. Rathbone's top three priorities for District 51 are student safety, academic achievement and chronic absenteeism. He admits that he is not "a highly qualified educator," and doesn't pretend to be. He intends to provide a voice as a parent and community member on curriculum matters, but leave those primarily to the "educator teams who work extra hours" on curriculum decisions.

Mr. Rathbone says of accountability that it extends not just to district administrators and teachers but to students, parents, principals and volunteers to rebuild the bridge between home and school.

While inexperienced, Mr. Rathbone's sincerity and willingness to work hard and learn count for a lot in the committee's estimation.

Kaci Cole, District D

Kaci Cole is a former teacher in SD51, who left teaching to raise her young child and is now employed by two small businesses in Grand Junction, creating and administering back-office processes. For the sake of full disclosure, RTB states that Ms. Cole served as a volunteer for RTB for several months before deciding to seek election to the D51 Board of Education.

Ms. Coles' responses to the RTB questionnaire were thoughtful, sometimes creative, concise and always responsive. She, like Ms. Woods in her responses, emphasized classroom safety, offering that the existing District policies on safety needed "careful review."

Ms. Coles' response on the questionnaire's Transparency question was excellent, pointing out that transparency is "more than posting information online." It's about inviting participation in committees and making citizens feel "informed, included and respected."

Ms. Coles fully endorses RTB's eight principles, and was an RTB supporter well before announcing her candidacy for SD51's Board of Education.

RTB believes Ms. Cole offers SD51 voters a very fine combination of qualities as a School Board member and deserves your favorable consideration.

Vicki Woods, District E

Vicki Woods is an experienced educator and was a principal in District 51 for many years. While she was the principal of Orchard Avenue Elementary School, its student success was outstanding even though its student demographic was a challenging one. Her questionnaire responses were knowledgeable and showed a keen sense of the importance of the relationships among students, parents, teachers and the district administration. She showed a strong awareness of student safety concerns, including their effects on enrollment. Additionally, her responses to the budgetary questions demonstrate a good grasp of the budget and budgetary challenges.

Ms. Woods' comments on the importance of the District's culture and climate were well thought out and diplomatic; she emphasized their effects on enrollment, faculty recruitment and retention, and students' success.

The committee recommends that readers go to the RTB website and read Ms. Woods' entire set of questionnaire responses, particularly her response to questions 3, 4 and 7, to understand her qualities as a candidate.

Ms. Woods earns our highest endorsement. RTB believes that Ms. Woods offers SD51 voters a very fine combination of qualities as a School Board member.

Non-Respondents

RTB has struggled with how to react to the candidates that refused to respond at all to the questionnaire. These same three failed to appear at a forum held by students at Grand Junction High School this past September, even after the forum ground rules were set by SD51 to forbid any follow-up questions, and all questions had to be given the candidates in advance. This "forum light" format was still not satisfactory to them. This is also in contrast to the conduct of every candidate but one in every other local election since RTB began its work in 2022.

As was disclosed to all candidates in the questionnaire itself, questions not answered will earn zero scores. Accordingly, these candidates' scores are zero. The block of candidates who chose not to respond to this written questionnaire made a partisan choice. This should call into question their commitment to serving the entirety of the community with collaboration and transparency.

You may find the candidates' FULL responses to our questionnaire and their scores at <https://www.restorethebalance.org/candidate-surveys>.