

## **Did Morgan send message?: Voters' ouster of school board incumbents may be expression of discontent with strife**

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### **Body**

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Jun. 3--In the spirit of Rodney King's quote -- "Can we all just get along?"-- Morgan County **voters** expressed their views Tuesday when they voted out the incumbent superintendent and two incumbent board members.

Bill Hopkins Jr. defeated Bob Balch for superintendent. Jeff McLemore won a four-person campaign without a runoff in District 7, taking Betty Hackett's seat away after one term.

Incumbent Dora Woodard finished third out of three candidates in the District 4 Republican primary.

Large turnout

Paul Holmes and Christina McLemore finished first and second respectively in the race, and will be in a July 13 runoff. The winner faces Democrat Stacy George in the November general election.

The vote numbers overwhelmingly **sent the message**. **Voter** turn-out was 42 percent larger than the average of the 2006 and 2008 primaries. After defeating four Republicans and a Democrat in 2006, Balch won only three boxes on Tuesday and Hopkins claimed 59.5 percent of the vote.

Woodard, who is in her second term, and Hackett both won one box, Sparkman Civic Center. Only two votes in each school board race were cast at that box.

Jeff McLemore said the **voters sent a message** that they were tired of the strife and discord of the past four years.

He said the vote is a **message** to new school leaders and the current board, which has often been split on key issues since Balch became superintendent.

"It looks like they were **sending a message**, but I don't want to read too much into it," Hopkins said. "Obviously, the people want something different."

Both Hopkins and Jeff McLe-more used the campaign tactics of focusing on the positive and trying to avoid criticizing their opposition.

No negativity

"Nobody wants to hear the negative campaigning and mud-slinging," Hopkins said. "It's counter productive, especially when you're talking about our children's education."

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Among the most controversial recent votes were the Brewer High School principal's contract extension and the yearly consideration of the Brewer girls basketball coach's contract.

"**Voters** want to see the board working together and working with the superintendent," Jeff Mc-Lemore said. "It's common sense that it helps if you encourage each other and work together to create a strength base."

Another **message** may have been **sent** at Hopkins' celebration, where at least nine principals made an appearance. Although some were there to support their new boss, many supported Hopkins during the campaign.

Principals' support

"I've felt I've had their support all along," Hopkins said. "I think they wanted someone with my experience (eight years as a principal). They wanted someone who has sat behind their desk."

Jeff McLemore said most of the board members were on the board when he was principal at Lacey's Spring School, and he believes he'll be able to work well with them.

He plans to try to work toward more compromise when he takes his seat in November.

He said his goal as a school board member is to support the superintendent and school employees.

"The worst thing is having a job in which you don't know where you stand, you don't know what to expect and, if someone goes over your head, you don't know if your boss will support you if you do what is expected," Jeff McLemore said.

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