

Dogwood Elementary PTO: Legislative Chair Report

October 2026 | Covering September 2026 activity

Prepared by Monica Burt, Legislative Chair

Germantown votes on November 3. This is an election edition, so it centers on that ballot and on what is new this month. The state legislature is out of session until January 2027, so there are no new bills to track. The action is the election itself, and that ballot runs from city hall all the way to the governor's race and three statewide amendments.

START HERE

The Month in Five Lines

A quick summary. Each line jumps to its section below.

- **Three bodies shape our schools, but only two run them:** the school board and the state decide how our schools are run, and the city helps pay. Some of these offices are on the November 3 ballot.
- **Your ballot, laid out plainly:** I list every contested race and candidate, and the same fair questions you can ask each one. I do not rate anyone.
- **The transfer policy passed:** the board approved it on its second and final reading on September 29. It takes effect for the 2027-28 enrollment cycle.
- **What the Houston High bond pays for:** about \$10 million for a targeted school renovation, paid by the city over time, plus a separate city pool project.
- **State bottom line:** no new votes. The spring laws stand, and the next state report is due November 1.

[SUMMARY](#)[WHO RUNS OUR SCHOOLS](#)[YOUR BALLOT](#)[SEPTEMBER UPDATES](#)[HOUSTON HIGH BOND](#)[STATE](#)[DATES AHEAD](#)[CONTACTS](#)

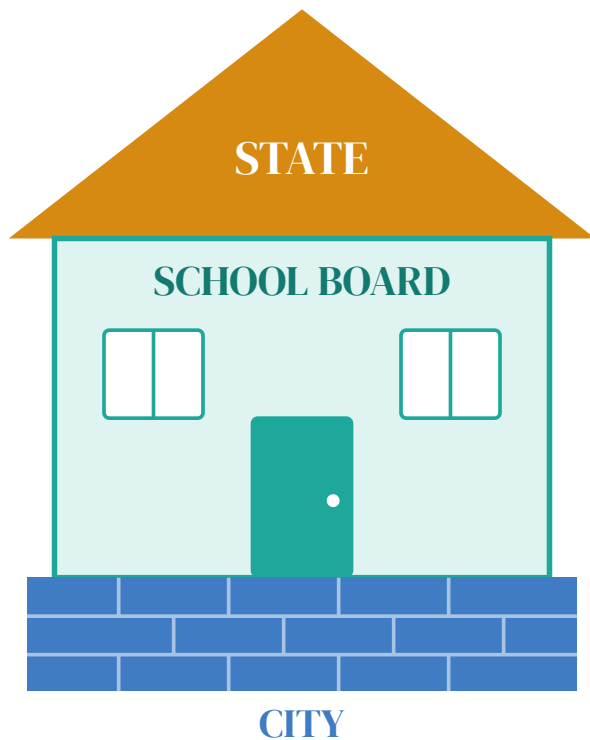
Executive Summary

Germantown holds its city and school board election on November 3, 2026. Because the ballot is the big news, this edition is built around it. I start with a plain civics map: three different bodies make three different kinds of decisions about our schools. Then I list every contested race and candidate on an even footing. I also share the same neutral questions you can put to each one, and I do not grade or endorse anyone.

Our district is the Germantown Municipal School District (GMSD), and our group is the Dogwood Elementary Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). The main new item from September is at the board level. On September 29 the board approved, on its second and final reading, a change to its inter-district transfer-priority policy, and it takes effect for the 2027-28 enrollment cycle. I also correct one detail from last month, and I walk through what the city's Houston High bond actually buys. The state legislature is out until January 2027, so there are no new bills to report, but the November 3 ballot includes the governor's race, the legislature, and three statewide amendments, which I cover below.

Who Controls Your Schools

Three bodies shape GMSD, and they do very different jobs. Only the school board and the state decide how our schools are run. The city's role is money and buildings. Here is who does what, and which seats you actually choose on November 3.



The roof: the state

Sets the rules over everything: the TISA funding formula, which pays about half our budget, the voucher program, and testing and graduation rules.

On your ballot: governor, legislature, 3 amendments

Inside: the school board

Runs the school. Five elected residents set policy, prepare the budget request, and hire and oversee the superintendent. The board does not set state funding or city taxes.

On your ballot: Position 4 (Position 2 is unopposed)

The foundation: the city

Helps build and helps pay, with no say in how the school is run. The Board of Mayor and Aldermen (BOMA), six elected members, sets a yearly cash contribution of about \$3.08 million by ordinance. Because GMSD cannot issue bonds under Tennessee law, the city issues bonds for school buildings, and it can also repay them. It also fills school board seats that open between elections.

On your ballot: Mayor, Alderman 1 and 2

What this means for your vote

On November 3 your ballot runs from city hall to the state. Locally, this year, you choose the Mayor, two Alderman seats, and two School Board seats (Position 4 is contested, Position 2 is unopposed). At the state level you choose the Governor and your seats in the Tennessee legislature, and you vote yes or no on three state constitutional amendments. You do not vote directly on the school funding formula or on the city's school contribution. You vote for the people who set them.

Sources for this map: the school board's duties come from Tennessee Code Annotated 49-2-203, summarized by the University of Tennessee County Technical Assistance Service (ctas.tennessee.edu); the board's makeup is on the district site (gmsdk12.org/board); the TISA formula is explained by the same service (ctas.tennessee.edu). The city's \$3.08 million contribution is an institutional figure set by city ordinance.

Your November 3 Ballot: The Candidates, and What to Ask Them

Here is every contested Germantown race, with the candidates listed evenly. I am not publishing a positions chart. The public record on school issues is uneven right now, with statements easy to find for some candidates and not for others. A chart would quietly reward whoever happens to have said more, so instead I give you the same fair questions to ask each person, plus nonpartisan tools to look them up ([linked below](#)). I do not rank or endorse anyone.

Mayor (open seat, Mayor Palazzolo is not running)

Edgar Babian

CANDIDATE FOR MAYOR

Campaign website: edgarbabian.com

Tony Salvaggio

CANDIDATE FOR MAYOR

Campaign website: salvaggioforgermantown.com

Alderman, Position 2 (contested)

Mary Anne Gibson

CANDIDATE, ALDERMAN POSITION 2

Campaign website: maryannegibson.com

Current Vice Mayor.

Todd Adams

CANDIDATE, ALDERMAN POSITION 2

Campaign website: toddadams4germantown.com

School Board, Position 4 (contested)

Vicki Gandee

CANDIDATE, SCHOOL BOARD POSITION 4

No campaign website found

Joy Williams

CANDIDATE, SCHOOL BOARD POSITION 4

Campaign website: choosejoy4gmsd.com

On the ballot as an independent candidate.

Unopposed seats

Scott Sanders

ALDERMAN POSITION 1, UNOPPOSED

No campaign website found

Dr. Heather Fisher

SCHOOL BOARD POSITION 2, UNOPPOSED

Campaign website: drheatherfisher.com

Appointed to Position 2 in August 2026.

Source for the candidate field: the Shelby County Election Commission (SCEC) official sample ballot for the November 3 election (electionsshelbytn.gov).

Where a candidate has a campaign website, their name links to it. Each card notes when we could not find one.

Also on your ballot: the state races

November 3 is a combined state, federal, and city ballot, so you vote on all of it at once. The state offices matter most for schools, because the governor and the legislature set the funding formula (TISA, Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement), the voucher program, and the testing and graduation rules. Here is the state part, as it appears on the Shelby County sample ballot.

Governor (open seat)

Marsha Blackburn

REPUBLICAN PARTY NOMINEE

Campaign website: marshablackburn.com

Jerri Green

DEMOCRATIC PARTY NOMINEE

Campaign website: greenforgovernor.com

The ballot also lists a long field of independent candidates for governor, plus a write-in line.

State legislature (look up your district)

Germantown is split across more than one state Senate and House district, so your state races depend on your address. Much of Germantown is in **Tennessee Senate District 31** ([Brent Taylor](#), Republican, and [David Weatherspoon](#), Democrat) and **Tennessee House District 83** ([Mark White](#), Republican, and [Margaret Price](#), Democrat), and parts of town fall in neighboring districts. See your exact districts and your exact ballot by address, no birthday needed, on the Secretary of State's GoVoteTN website or app (sos.tn.gov/govotetn) before you vote.

One name appears twice. Brent Taylor is on the ballot for re-election to Senate District 31 and also as the Republican nominee for U.S. House District 9, where he faces state Rep. [Justin Pearson](#), who likewise appears for his own state House seat. If Taylor wins the congressional race, he would have to give up the state Senate seat, which would change who represents much of Germantown in Nashville. Sources: the SSEC official sample ballot and [Tennessee Lookout](#) (August 6, 2026).

Three statewide questions (constitutional amendments)

Every voter also decides three yes-or-no amendments to the Tennessee Constitution:

Amendment 1 would let a court deny bail before trial for certain serious crimes, and would require the court to state its reasons.

Amendment 2 would bar the state legislature from imposing a state property tax on real, personal, or mixed property. Tennessee does not levy a state property tax today, and this amendment concerns only a state-level tax. The city and county property taxes that help fund our schools are separate.

Amendment 3 would clarify existing rights for crime victims and add new ones.

Read the official full text and the Attorney General's summary of each amendment from the Tennessee Secretary of State (sos.tn.gov), or a neutral plain-language breakdown at Ballotpedia (ballotpedia.org), and decide for yourself. One rule worth knowing: an amendment passes only if it gets more yes votes than no votes and its yes votes add up to more than half of all votes cast for governor. So leaving an amendment blank while voting for governor makes it harder to pass. The same ballot also carries federal races (U.S. Senate and U.S. House); those sit further from K-12 decisions, so this edition stays on the state and local offices. This report does not take a position on any race or question. Source: the SSEC official sample ballot (electionsshelbytn.gov).

Questions to ask, local versus state

Ask everyone running for the same office the same things, which keeps it fair. The questions differ by level, because the local offices and the state offices control different parts of our schools.

Mayor and aldermen

- How will you work with the school board, and how often will you meet with them?
- How will the city keep kids safe at and around our schools, including traffic, crossings, and police presence?
- As Germantown grows, how will new housing affect enrollment and space in our schools?
- What would you do to help young families afford to live here?
- When a school needs building help, like the Houston High renovation, how should the city decide?

School board

- What are your top priorities for the district?
- How will you keep class sizes manageable?
- How will you recruit and keep good teachers?
- Where do you stand on the transfer-priority policy?
- How will you keep parents informed and involved?

Governor and legislature

- How should the state fund public schools through the TISA formula?
- Where do you stand on the Education Freedom Scholarship (voucher) program and its effect on districts like GMSD?
- What would you change, if anything, about state testing, including the third-grade reading rules that can hold students back?
- What would you do about teacher pay, so good teachers stay in Tennessee classrooms?
- How should the state support safety in our schools?

How to write to them. Each candidate's own contact details are on their Vote411 and Ballotpedia pages, linked just below. You can also reach the current officeholders directly: the Mayor and Aldermen through the City of Germantown (germantown-tn.gov), the school board through the district (gmsdk12.org/board), and your state legislators through the Tennessee General Assembly (capitol.tn.gov).

Nonpartisan tools to research every candidate

- **Vote411, from the League of Women Voters:** candidates answer the same questions in their own words, looked up by your address. vote411.org
- **Ballotpedia:** a sample-ballot lookup with a page for each race and candidate. ballotpedia.org
- **Shelby County Election Commission:** the official candidate list, your sample ballot, and voting details. electionsshelbytn.gov
- **GoVoteTN, from the Tennessee Secretary of State:** type in any Tennessee address to see your exact ballot, your districts, and your elected officials. There is a free app too, and it stays useful after the election. sos.tn.gov/govotetn • [get the app](#)

A public board or city meeting is another way to hear a candidate directly. This report does not endorse anyone, and these tools treat every candidate the same.

Local Updates: September

The board met twice in September, a work session on September 15 and a business meeting on September 29. Both were at the District Office, 3350 Forest Hill Irene Road, and live-streamed on the [GMSD YouTube channel](#). One scheduling note: September's meetings fell on the third and fifth Tuesdays, not the usual second and fourth. October returns to the normal pattern, on October 20 and October 27.

The transfer policy passed

The board approved its inter-district transfer-priority policy on the second of two required readings at the September 29 business meeting. The policy takes effect immediately and will apply to the open-enrollment process early next year, for families applying for the 2027-28 school year. Source: Daily Memphian, September 30, 2026.

Here is what it does. It adds a new tier to the ranked order the district uses to fill the out-of-district seats it chooses to open. Two groups move up: grandchildren of Germantown residents, who attend tuition-free, and the children of people who graduated from Houston High, or from Germantown High before the district formed in 2014, who may attend but pay tuition if they live outside Germantown. For 2026-27 that tuition equals the city's per-pupil contribution, about \$535 for a family living in Shelby County, and more for families outside the county or the state.

All of it depends on space. Resident students are guaranteed a seat, and the district takes non-residents only if room is left after that. Enrollment has been easing, mainly from lower birthrates, so each incoming kindergarten class tends to run a little smaller than the class that graduates. For a sense of scale, the district turned down 640 transfer requests this year, more than 500 of them in kindergarten through eighth grade. Superintendent Jason Manuel framed the change around the city being landlocked and around longtime residents who keep paying taxes after their own children graduate. Board member Andy Ellis called it "more of a goodwill gesture," not a guarantee. Chairman Brian Curry said the district is competing with private schools because of vouchers, and called the priority the right thing to do for tax-paying residents.

A correction from last month. My September edition said the change would give tuition-free priority to two groups: grandchildren of residents and legacy alumni families. That was half right. Grandchildren of Germantown residents attend tuition-free. The legacy alumni families, tied to Houston High and the pre-2014 Germantown High, get priority but still pay tuition if they live outside Germantown. Sources: Daily Memphian (September 30, 2026) and Fox13 Memphis (fox13memphis.com). I am correcting it here, and I apologize for the earlier overstatement.

Board seat, Position 2

Dr. Heather Fisher holds Position 2. The city appointed her in August, and the school board seated her the next night, after Scotty Hendricks Jr. resigned. In Germantown the city government fills school board vacancies, not the board itself. Dr. Fisher is the unopposed candidate for the seat on November 3, and nothing about this changed in September.

What the \$10M Houston High Bond Buys

In August the city approved a bond of about \$13.5 million. A bond is money the city borrows now and repays over time. About \$10 million is for Houston High School. The rest, about \$3.5 million, is for the indoor pool, the natatorium, at the Germantown Athletic Club (GAC), which is a city recreation facility, not a school. The two portions are funded differently. The Germantown Athletic Club's own revenues repay the \$3.5 million pool portion, so that part is self-funded and does not rely on taxes. The \$10 million school portion is a general obligation the city repays from its general budget over time, the same budget that property taxes, local sales taxes, and state-shared revenue all feed. The record does not show the city raising property taxes to pay for it. Keep the two apart, since only the school portion pays for school work.

Where these figures come from. The Board of Mayor and Aldermen approved the \$13.5 million bond unanimously on August 24, 2026, with \$10 million for Houston High and \$3.5 million for the natatorium, as reported by Daily Memphian on August 25, 2026. The specific bond resolution numbers are not posted on a public city page yet, so I am not printing any.

What the money is for

This is a targeted renovation, not a rebuild. The \$10 million funds a larger cafeteria, with added capacity so the school can run fewer lunch periods, which eases scheduling, a renovated front lobby, and some fine-arts upgrades. Bigger items would need separate funding later.

On timing, there is no firm groundbreaking date on the record yet. Superintendent Jason Manuel has framed the near-term work as design and readiness, so the money can be spent when it is available.

Who issues the bond, and who repays it

1 The city borrows the money. The City of Germantown issues the bond, not the district, because municipal school districts in Tennessee rely on the city and the county for building dollars.

2 The money gets repaid over years. The \$10 million school share is a general obligation the city repays from its general budget over time. The GAC covers the \$3.5 million pool portion from its own revenues.

Future projects wait on capacity. As older city debt is paid off, room opens up to borrow again, which is how later, bigger work could become possible.

How GMSD capital projects get decided

The board sets its building priorities in stages, then looks to the city and county to fund them. The board approved Houston High renovation work at a special-called meeting on April 14, 2026. A full redesign by the firm 4F Design was estimated at about \$100 million, which city leaders said was too steep, so the city pledged \$10 million toward a targeted set of work.

The \$100 million full-redesign estimate and the \$10 million city pledge are from Daily Memphian's August 25, 2026 report of the bond vote.

Tennessee State Legislature

The 114th General Assembly adjourned on April 23, 2026. No new bills moved in September, and the 115th General Assembly convenes in January 2027. The items below reached their final form this spring. I re-checked each status on the state legislature website on September 30.

- **Voucher expansion (HB 2532): enacted, Public Chapter 963.** It raises the statewide Education Freedom Scholarship ceiling to 35,000 for 2026-27. A voucher lets a family direct state funds toward private school costs. The program is running this year. State dollars follow the student, so this is the law most likely to move district revenue over time.
- **Open enrollment (HB 349): failed.** It died in the House K-12 Subcommittee on a 4-4 tie on March 24, 2026. Rep. Mark White, Germantown's representative, voted no. The outcome keeps local control over class sizes.
- **Autism provider access (HB 2327): enacted, Public Chapter 1112.** It lets parents bring privately contracted behavior providers into school for students with autism, with parental consent and background checks. It applies for 2026-27.
- **Virtual schools (SB 2441): enacted, Public Chapter 905.** Effective July 1, 2026, it requires districts to close virtual schools that fail to meet continued-operation standards. Its relevance to GMSD appears low.
- **TISA study (SB 2385): enacted, Public Chapter 1032.** It directs a state committee to study how the funding formula identifies low-income students. The report is due November 1, 2026. That is the next state deadline I am watching.
- **Immigration status enrollment records (HB 793): no public chapter.** The House passed an amended version on March 16, 2026, but the official record shows no public chapter number and no signature. So it did not clearly become law in 2026. It could return in the 2027 session.

Why the state picture matters for Dogwood: state money is about 51 percent of the GMSD general fund (the FY27 general fund basis). Because those dollars follow enrollment, both the voucher program and the November 1 TISA report are worth watching over time.

Looking Ahead: Dates and How to Engage

- **October 5:** voter registration deadline for the November 3 election. [Register online here.](#)
- **October 14 to 29:** early voting for the November 3 election.
- **October 20:** GMSD board work session at 5:30 p.m., District Office.
- **October 27:** GMSD board business meeting at 6:00 p.m. Watch for the September 29 minutes to post, which would record the transfer-policy vote.
- **November 1:** the TISA committee report on counting low-income students is due.
- **November 3:** Germantown election for mayor, two aldermen seats, and two school board seats.
- **January 2027:** the 115th General Assembly convenes, with bill pre-filing expected late this year.

How to engage: confirm your voter registration (tnmap.tn.gov/voterlookup), learn about the November candidates, attend a public board or city meeting, track bills yourself at wapp.capitol.tn.gov, and bring questions to the Legislative Chair.

Contact Directory

When reaching out, identify yourself as a Dogwood Elementary parent and reference the specific bill number or issue.

State Legislature

Rep. Mark White, State Representative, District 83 (R), rep.mark.white@capitol.tn.gov

Sen. Brent Taylor, State Senator, District 31 (R), sen.brent.taylor@capitol.tn.gov. Note: Sen. Taylor is running for U.S. House District 9 in November, so District 31 may have a new senator in 2027.

GMSD School Board

Brian Curry (Chair), Angela Griffith (Vice Chair), Ryan Strain, Andy Ellis, and Dr. Heather Fisher (Position 2), all reachable through gmsdk12.org.

GMSD Administration

Jason Manuel, Superintendent, through gmsdk12.org.

City of Germantown

Mayor Mike Palazzolo, through germantown-tn.gov. Note: Mayor Palazzolo is not seeking re-election, and the November 3 race is Edgar Babian versus Tony Salvaggio.

Alderman Sherrie Hicks, Position 3, Education Commission liaison, shicks@germantown-tn.gov.

As always, I welcome questions from any Dogwood PTO member. My role is to keep our community informed and connected to the decisions being made at the school board, city, and state levels that affect our students and families.

Sources

The main sources behind this edition, grouped by origin. PRIMARY means an official record. PRESS or SECONDARY means a news outlet.

Tennessee General Assembly, wapp.capitol.tn.gov PRIMARY

Official state bill pages showing status, sponsor, and public chapter. Re-pulled September 30, 2026.

HB 2532, voucher expansion. Enacted as Public Chapter 963, ceiling raised to 35,000 for 2026-27. [View bill](#)

HB 0349, open enrollment (failed). Died in the House K-12 Subcommittee on a 4-4 tie, March 24, 2026. [View bill](#)

HB 2327, autism provider access. Enacted as Public Chapter 1112. [View bill](#)

SB 2441, virtual schools. Enacted as Public Chapter 905, effective July 1, 2026. [View bill](#)

SB 2385, TISA study. Enacted as Public Chapter 1032, report due November 1, 2026. [View bill](#)

HB 0793, immigration status enrollment. No public chapter recorded in 2026. [View bill](#)

Governance and civics PRIMARY

The statute and formula behind the "Who Controls Your Schools" map.

School board duties (TCA 49-2-203), via UT CTAS. [View page](#)

GMSD board composition. gmsdk12.org/board

TISA funding formula (UT CTAS). [View page](#)

GMSD board and district pages PRIMARY

The September minutes were not posted at the September 30 pull, so the second-reading outcome rests on the posted agenda, not approved minutes.

Board meeting dates (Sept 15, Sept 29, Oct 20, Oct 27). gmsdk12.org/board

BOEconnect portal, Organization 557. Sept 15 and Sept 29 agendas posted; minutes pending. [View portal](#)

Open-enrollment priority tiers. [View page](#)

Tuition and waivers. [View page](#)

Elections PRIMARY

The candidate field and voting dates from the Shelby County Election Commission.

Shelby County Election Commission. Candidate list, sample ballot, and key dates. electionsshelbytn.gov

Vote411 (League of Women Voters). Address-based candidate guide. vote411.org

Ballotpedia. Sample-ballot lookup and candidate pages. ballotpedia.org

Transfer policy and Houston High bond

PRESS / SECONDARY

Non-paywalled reporting used to corroborate items. Dollar sub-figures from paywalled or unreachable records are flagged in the text.

Fox13 Memphis, transfer-policy change. Grandchildren tuition-free; alumni families pay tuition. [Read article](#)

City of Germantown. BOMA agendas and minutes (not reachable for this edition; listed for browser review). germantown-tn.gov

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Prepared by Monica Burt, Legislative Chair

This publication reflects the author's own research and analysis as an individual parent volunteer. It does not represent official positions of the Dogwood Elementary PTO, the Germantown Municipal School District, the City of Germantown, or the State of Tennessee.