

Akron Beacon Journal

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Voters have spoken. Now the Akron school board needs to show it's listening | Editorial

Akron Beacon Journal Editorial Board Akron Beacon Journal

Nov. 14, 2025, 6:01 a.m. ET

The voters have spoken.

After a heated and sometimes contentious campaign season, voters in the general election Nov. 4 opted to elect several new faces to the seven-member Akron Board of Education.

Challengers [Nathan R. Jarosz](#), Karmaya Kelly and [Phil Montgomery](#) were picked in a crowded field of eight to fill three of the four available seats on the school board. The Rev. [Gregory B. Harrison](#), who was appointed to the board last year, was the only incumbent to hold onto his seat.

The election marks a new start — and, we hope, an end to the divisiveness among the existing seven board members that too often held the district back.

The three newcomers, along with Harrison, have all pledged to lead Akron Public Schools in a new, more transparent direction when they take office in January.

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“When we are transparent, I think people have more confidence in the board and that confidence is part of the stability,” Harrison [told the Beacon Journal](#) during the campaign.

Montgomery, who was the top vote getter with 17% of the roughly 66,403 votes cast, told the Beacon Journal that voters are demanding more transparency and better communication from the board that oversees Summit County's largest school district.

"This is a mandate," Montgomery said on election night. "It's not a fluke. We're going through what the community believes needs to be a change in the Akron Public School District."

Montgomery brings a unique perspective to the board as Summit County's finance and budget director, offering a strong financial background at a time the district is facing tough financial choices.

APS must confront a projected budget shortfall in the millions and major building projects in Kenmore and North Hill, along with a series of budget and policy changes on the state and federal levels.

We hope the seven board members will work with the recently appointed treasurer and the superintendent to make budget choices that best serve the district's 19,700 students.

Speaking of the superintendent...

Longtime Akron educator Mary Outley is now seven months into the role after the departure of the former superintendent in April following an investigation that concluded he created a toxic work environment.

While there remains disagreement about the way Outley was picked for the role without an interview process, she's the district's leader. We hope the new board and superintendent seek to foster a productive and open working relationship — one built on mutual respect and trust.

The new board must set clear expectations for both the treasurer and the superintendent — the only two APS employees who report directly to the board — and then hold the administrators accountable, while also supporting them.

We also encourage the board and administration to make sure residents from all sections of Akron are part of the conversation when tough choices are being made. It was promising to hear Montgomery [pledging to host monthly meetings](#) that rotate among the district's school clusters.

As we've said before, Akron needs a strong school board to right the ship and earn back trust both internally and in the community.

The voters have spoken.

Now it's up to the new Akron Board of Education to show it's truly listening.

This piece was written by Akron Beacon Journal Executive Editor Cheryl Powell on behalf of the editorial board of the Beacon Journal. Editorials are fact-based assessments of issues of importance to the communities we serve. These are not the opinions of our reporting staff members, who strive for neutrality in their reporting.