

# Niceville woman challenges school board incumbent

By Del Lessard  
Beacon Staff Writer

A Niceville woman has prefiled to seek the District 5 School Board seat that includes the Niceville and Valparaiso area.

Melissa Thrush, 42, of 50 Lanman Road, Niceville, prefiled paperwork with the Supervisor of Elections seeking the seat currently held by Howard Hill, Niceville, who is seeking reelection.

Thrush has been married to Dr. Chris Reid, a kidney specialist, for the past 19 years and they are the parents of four children, ranging in age from 18 months to nine years. Three of the children will be enrolled in the Okaloosa County school

system next year, she said.

Thrush attended Okaloosa County public schools from first grade through twelfth grade, at Elliott Point Elementary, Meigs Junior High, and Choctawhatchee High, graduating in 1986. She attended North Carolina State University and earned a bachelor of science degree in electrical engineering and a master's of Integrated Manufacturing Systems Engineering.

Prior to moving to the area, she was the senior computer systems engineer for the Electrical Engineering Department at the University of Virginia, and also held positions or internships with a number of large industrial

companies. For the past nine years Thrush has been a stay-at-home mother.

"My experience as a parent and analytical skill set will provide me with a practical approach to decision making," said Thrush. "Public education



Melissa Thrush

is the foundation of our American democracy. I believe passionately in the mission of our public schools to provide an excellent education to all of our children."

Thrush told the Beacon that even though the country is still in an economic downturn that it's critical that the school district maintain its excellent education system. "It brings jobs and people to the area," she said. Technology in local schools is also "vitaly important" to the success of students and the school system, she said. Without up-to-date technology students won't be able

to compete in the global economy, she said.

Thrush said she is not running against the incumbent, Howard Hill, personally, but said she was spurred to throw her hat in the ring since no incumbent school board member seeking reelection in the past six years had been opposed.

Thrush has until May 17 to collect at least 1,294 signed petitions required to qualify by petition. If she is unable to qualify by petition she said she would pay the qualifying fee, \$1,347, during the qualification period, from noon June 14 through noon June 18.

Since the school board races are non-partisan, there will be no primary. The general election is set for Nov. 2.

Hill and Thrush are the only announced candidates for the District 5 seat so far.

The District 1 and District 3 seats are also at stake this year. So far incumbent Cindy Frakes is the only candidate who has prefiled in District 1. In District 3 incumbent Rodney Walker and challenger Paul Wendel Brock have prefiled.