

NABOR School Board Candidate Forum  
June 21, 2022

DISTRICT 3		
Jana Greer	Kelly Lichter	Jen Mitchell
Opening Statements		
<p>[00:25:07] I'm concerned that we are not America First in our classrooms. We have a 37% passing rate in our civics literacy tests this year in the county. Our students are not graduating at reading and math level. We need changes. With a \$1.3 billion budget, I think that that needs to be focused more in the classroom versus administration. I want to continue to see parental rights be championed and follow what our governor has done</p>	<p>[00:23:03] Over 10 years ago, my husband and I founded a school that is now the top performing public school in Collier County. It's ranked in the top 1% in the state of Florida. I will continue to fight for the students and pursue a much better education opportunity here in Collier. We have the resources, and unfortunately, we're not using those resources wisely.</p>	<p>[00:20:48] I'm very proud of what we've done here in Collier County Public Schools. But we certainly have work to do. And it's my hope to continue focusing on student achievement, expanding career and technical education, attracting and retaining great teachers, and maintaining strict oversight of the budget.</p>
<p>1. What do you envision the role to be of the school board when it comes to safety on school campuses and preventing incidences of gun violence like we've seen recently at the elementary school in Uvalde, Texas and the 2018 high school mass shooting in Parkland?</p>		
<p>[01:09:43] The school board should be making sure our schools are absolutely secure for our students. I would like to see instant connectivity, in either from video camera or in a call box, so if there ever is an issue within the school, there's a quicker response time from our sheriff's department. Also, they can buy cameras to see what's going on in the system or within the schools so they're not hunting which hall is he down, what room, trying to figure it out.</p>	<p>[01:10:42] I do want to give credit to the Collier County School District and the partnership with the CCSO. It's been tremendous in terms of safety.  But I would also focus on - and this is policy - student decorum and discipline in the schools. We have to raise the expectations of the way students behave, how they treat their friends and peers, but also the respect towards their teachers. We also need to ensure that policies are in place so that if we are seeing red flags with a student, things are being reported so that we can identify students that may have some serious mental issues.</p>	<p>[01:08:23] Our role is budgetary, it's policymaking, it's governance in terms of budget, ensuring that we have the resources to properly address the student mental health issues that come before us. In terms of policy, ensure that we have the proper policies in place with regard to the Student Code of Conduct, and auditing our processes to make sure that we are complying with state statutes</p>

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<p>2. In late March, Governor Ron DeSantis signed into law, The Parental Rights in Education bill. You may have heard this dubbed by opponents as the "Don't Say Gay" bill. Supporters say it's meant to allow parents to determine when and in what way to introduce LGBTQ topics to their children. Parents also have an option to sue a school district if the new policy is violated. Opponents argue it will hurt LGBTQ children, noting that LGBTQ youth already face higher health and suicide risks in their cisgender or straight peers, due in part to the marginalization they already face. As a member of the school board, how would you hope to balance compliance with this new law and what's in the best interest of all children in the district?</p>		
<p>[00:30:38] Make sure we have a policy that eliminates any of that teaching [from grades] K to three. That policy needs to be made by the board, and then we need to make sure that there's compliance through our teachers and administrators in each school. There should also be a clear policy so that parents can report [problems].</p>	<p>[00:32:14] As Ms. Greer said, we do need to establish policy. But I do not support this agenda coming into the schools. There isn't room in the day to bring in political agendas.</p>	<p>[00:33:26] We do have a Controversial Issues Policy, currently, that requires principal permission to teach anything that's not in the teaching standards, which this is not. So, the idea that this is happening currently in Collier County classrooms is false. However, if a teacher were to cross the line, we do have policies in place to handle that. And I fully expect that our Board Attorney, by July 1, will be able to apprise us of what that new policy will look like to ensure that it is in line with state statute.</p>

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<p>3. How would you characterize the duties and responsibilities of an elected county school board member? And since the School Board will be selecting a new district superintendent in the coming year, what qualities would you be looking for in a new superintendent?</p>		
<p>[00:57:32] The school board is the policymaker. The fiduciary responsibility also stops with them.</p> <p>The new superintendent will be considered like the CEO, somebody who has been a parent or is currently a parent, somebody who has honesty, integrity, who understands education, who has a passion for education. Managing and running a billion-dollar budget is a huge thing. And so, we need to have somebody who's got the competency to help lead that but also through the board's authority, because they are to be under the board.</p>	<p>[00:56:11] The most important duty of a school board member is really to get back to focusing on academic achievement.</p> <p>Qualities that I would look for: a superintendent that is honest, has integrity, cares about accountability, transparency, supports charter schools, and isn't interested in self-promotion - rather interested in acknowledging the issues that are going on and coming up with solutions with the board.</p>	<p>[00:58:11] The role of a school board member boils down to hire, fire, and evaluate the superintendent; set district policy; and oversee the budget. He is in charge of the operation, the CEO; we're the Board of Trustees.</p> <p>The next superintendent must have a strategic vision for increasing student achievement, needs to be an excellent communicator, community minded, fiscally responsible.</p>

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<p>4. Data released in April by the National Education Association shows that despite efforts by the Florida Legislature to improve teacher starting pay, Florida remains near the bottom in the ranking of average teacher pay. In 2020, the Florida Legislature enacted a plan to increase teacher starting salary to \$47,500 a year. As a result, starting teacher pay in Florida increased in the national ranking from 30th to 16th place, but the plan does little to help experienced teachers. Overall, Florida's average teacher pay ranking stands in 48th place. This plus Collier County's well-documented affordable housing crisis could make the region a difficult one for teachers to both live and work in. How could the school board be working on this issue regarding teacher pay and retention?</p>		
<p>[01:20:18] The school board should be focusing on giving a livable wage to our teachers. We need to focus on retention of our excellent teachers. If we can, from a budget standpoint, move funding, cut expenses in other areas to help give a livable wage to our teachers. That should be 100% the focus.</p>	<p>[01:21:49} We have made improvements with teacher pay. I think we need to go a step further. We need to take a serious look at the budget and audit our administrative staff. Since I left [the School Board]in 2018, there have been several newly-created, very high-paying positions.  Also -- a lot of teachers don't leave because of the pay. It's about job satisfaction. So many extra responsibilities are placed on teachers year after year that they're exhausted, they're stressed out. They don't have the resources at the school level, and instead, we've got many people at the admin building that are disconnected from the actual students and teachers in the classrooms. I think that's something we, as a board, need to change significantly.</p>	<p>[01:22:55] I could not agree with Ms. Lichter more. Pay is not the primary issue when you talk to teachers. It's as she said, lack of job satisfaction, heaping more and more on their plate, expectations. A simple thing you can do as a board member - and I believe our board has - is to send the directive not one more new initiative going into this next school year.  Since I've been on the board in 2018, we have increased pay across all pay schedules - not just teachers - by 16%. And Collier County actually addressed the issue of veteran teachers, and made sure they got a bump when our new teachers got a bump as well.  We're never going to be able to pay them what they're worth. But there are a lot of things we can do to improve, no doubt about it.</p>

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<p>5. Local school district officials all over Florida are now engaging with the impact of new education legislation that allows parents to have more input in what sorts of materials are available to students in school libraries and on school media center shelves. House Bill 1467 gives parents, and anyone from the public, more access to the process of selecting and removing books and instructional materials. 5a. What role should members of the school board play in this process? 5b. And what metric would you apply to determine if a request to remove a certain book or material should be followed and then that material not be made available to students?</p>		
<p>[00:46:23] Currently, Florida statute bans pornographic materials from our students. There needs to be a clear selection process from the beginning that protects our students from those materials in this first place. I want to focus on allowing parents to have the say of what their kids can learn. I think a parent opt in, if it has to be included, is an option. But being informed as a parent is ultimately what needs to happen.</p> <p>What metric: Did not answer.</p>	<p>[00:45:25] Questionable materials don't belong in schools.</p> <p>What metric: Did not answer. Did not define "questionable material."</p>	<p>[00:43:38] There is a process in place that was legislated. It's not for me [as a School Board member] to say what your child can learn in their AP college lit class or for you to say what my child can learn. The new legislation, though, sets up committees of community members to read through the books when an objection comes in, make a determination, present it to the board, and then we make the final determination. That's as the legislation reads currently.</p> <p>What metric: Did not answer.</p>