

Transcript of the file Collier County School Board Forum – June 21, 2022
102 minutes in length

Speakers:

District 1 Candidates:

Kimberly Ann Boobyer

Jerry Rutherford

Jory Westberry

District 3 Candidates:

Jana Greer

Kelly Lichter

Jen Mitchell

District 5 Candidates

Timothy Moshier

Roy Terry

Ana Turino

Dr. Arthur Boyer

Jackie Keay

Moderator: John Davis

Watch the replay on Facebook:

https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=732566731319095

[session begins 00:00:00]

Ryan Bleggi: It is my pleasure to welcome you to the 2022 Collier County School Board Candidates Forum. My name is Ryan Bleggi. I'm president of the Naples Area Board of Realtors. We are pleased to co-host tonight's event with Naples Better Government. And we hope that this opportunity will help you understand the candidates' positions on issues important to you. Thank you for joining us. We would like to begin with the Pledge of Allegiance. Please stand and join me in the Pledge.

Group: I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

[00:00:53]

Ryan Bleggi: Thank you, everyone. Our timekeepers, tonight, are Randy Lichtman and Dennis Sanders, who are working closely together to ensure that the forum is fair and that all candidates have equal time to speak. At this time, I would like to introduce our moderator, John Davis, who has been a reporter/producer for WGCU since 2007. For more than a decade, he served as the local host for NPR's Morning Edition. He also serves as producer and host of WGCU's radio talk program, Gulf Coast Live Arts Edition with John Davis. Prior to joining WGCU, he worked at WDUQ FM in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania - now WESA - covering local government and general assignments.

John studied journalism at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh before earning a bachelor of arts degree in communication from FGCU. His work has garnered awards from the Press Club of Western Pennsylvania, the Radio Television Digital News Association, and a first-place award and Best in Show from the Florida

Associated Press for his investigative work in 2011. Davis helped lead news team coverage around the clock during Hurricane Irma in 2017, which won a national Edward R. Murrow Award. More recently, his election input political coverage has garnered awards from the Florida Association of Broadcast Journalists. Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. John Davis.

[00:02:45]

John Davis: Good evening, and welcome, everybody, to tonight's Collier County School Board Candidate Forum sponsored by the Naples Area Board of Realtors and Naples Better Government in partnership with Collier Citizens Council, The League of Women Voters of Collier County, and Greater Naples Leadership.

In the upcoming [August] 23rd primary election, 11 candidates on stage here with me tonight, in total, are vying for three district seats on the school board. These are nonpartisan elections, and all registered voters in Collier County, regardless of party affiliation, are eligible to vote for three school board candidates, one in each of district one, district three and district five. If no candidate, in a particular race, garners at least 50% of the vote, the top two vote getters in that race will advance to the general election on November 8th.

And joining me now, on stage, I'd like to welcome all of the candidates in the race for Collier County School Board District One, we have Kimberly Ann Boobyer, Jerry Rutherford, as well as, excuse me, Dr. Jory Westbury. And in the race for Collier School Board District Three, we're joined by candidates Jana Greer, Kelly Lichter, along with incumbent board member, Jen Mitchell. And in the School Board District Five race, we have Dr. Arthur Boyer, Jackie Keay, Timothy Moshier, and the incumbent Roy Terry, as well as Ana Turino.

[00:04:00]

Now throughout this evening's forum, questions will be posed to candidates in groups based on which district seat that they are running for. But throughout the course of the night, each candidate will have the same opportunity to answer the same questions. And each candidate will be given an opportunity to deliver a two-minute opening statement before the questions begin. We'll get started with that shortly. And we're urging the candidates not to use their time to make any personal attacks against an opponent in this forum as it's not really a debate. It's more of a candidate forum, an opportunity to get to know who's running. But just in case, if candidates do offer any kind of personal attack, then the person who that attack was lobbed at will be offered an opportunity to offer a one-minute rebuttal, but only under those circumstances will there be any back and forth.

At the conclusion of the forum, each candidate will have one last opportunity to offer a one-minute closing statement. And we have our timekeepers here in the front that are going to help us stay on track for tonight. So, whenever a response gets down to 30 seconds, you will not be interrupted but you will see that 30-second warning sign. And when your time is up, we have a bell to let you know. So, when you hear that noise that means that your minute is up.

And we also welcome our in-person audience here at the Naples Area Board of Realtors Convention Center, those listening on WGCU FM and watching online at WGCU.org, News-Press.com, NaplesNews.com, and through Facebook Live through the Facebook pages of each of those organizations. So, with that in mind, we would ask that anyone refrain from taking video in the room

tonight. There will be plenty of video and audio documentation of this this forum tonight. And we would also ask anybody in the audience here in person to refrain from any kind of booing, clapping, [sign-waving], or any other activity that might delay or disrupt the progress of the forum.

[00:05:54]

And with that, we're going to go ahead and **begin with opening statements.** And we're going to begin with Kimberly Ann Boobyer who is a district one candidate.

Kimberly Ann Boobyer: Thank you. Good evening. My name is Kimberly Boobyer. I'm running in district one. I am a proud American and an intelligent, well-informed citizen that believes in civic responsibility and taking action. I have a beautiful 16-year-old daughter with Down syndrome. I am a mama bear. I do not fight indiscriminately. I fight with courage and purpose using wisdom, discernment, and common sense.

I will fight for all students in Collier County, but especially for the 38%, on average, that are failing ELA and math. CCPS has 41 elementary schools. On the most recent FSA scores for third grade, 22 of them ranked below the county average of having 62% of their students achieving satisfactory grades or better. That is more than half of our elementary school third graders failing to score satisfactory or better in the Florida State Assessment. Shadowlawn, in my district, ranks 41st - that is dead last - with only 31% of third graders able to score satisfactory or better. That equates to 69% failing ELA and math. We are still awaiting the latest results for grades four through ten. We can only hope that they improved from last year, because 60% of Lely high ninth graders and tenth graders were failing ELA and math.

I will maintain fiscal responsibility with the \$1.3 billion budget and find ways to shift dollars spent on administrative staff to provide for greater teacher resources to address the 38% of students that are failing.

I will ensure parental rights and education and keep Woke Gender Ideology out of schools. I will protect students by supporting our excellent school security policies. I will support mental health initiatives that include parental consent. I will seek to better engage parent involvement throughout CCPS. I will restore the foundations of academic excellence and traditional values for all students.

Vote for me, Kimberly Boobyer, district one, the best candidate. Thank you.

[00:08:23]

John Davis: Thank you for that. And I apologize. I thought I heard a bell. And Jerry Rutherford is also a candidate for district one. Please give us your opening statements, sir.

Jerry Rutherford: Hello, I'm Jerry Rutherford. I'm running for school board district one. I've been your voice at school board meetings for over 35 years, speaking over 300 times at the school board meetings on your behalf. If I haven't espoused your values or your reasoning, it's because maybe I haven't heard from you. I've been there all the time. I've been speaking on behalf of those who could not or would not attend school board meetings. I was there when the school board and superintendent made good decisions and bad decisions. My voice for you was ignored many times, because I was on the outside and didn't have a vote. And even when I brought 1,600 signed petitions from businesses and individuals, I was still ignored. I want your voice to be heard.

I have a plan for reducing the budget, increasing the teachers' opportunities for promotion, turning the schools into a well-oiled machine. You say, "Well that's a very bold statement." Well, yes, it is, true. But I have to be on the inside in order to exercise this-- I call it a reasoning way of doing things-- the principle. This is a principle I used when I was in life insurance for 20 years. And as a staff manager, my staff led the entire district in production using this principle. John Wanamaker, a steel magnate increased his production overnight by using this principle.

After 35 years and being mostly ignored because I didn't have a vote, I ask that you put me on the inside to accomplish the goals that I know will work. Vote for experience and dedication. Vote Jerry Rutherford, district one. Thank you.

[00:10:38]

John Davis: Thank you so much. And our final candidate from the district one race, we're going to hear now from Dr. Jory Westbury.

Jory Westberry: Good evening, everyone. And thank you so much for being here. It's very important that we have your input, and that you're listening closely to what goes on tonight.

Why am I running again for the school board? I want to apply my experience, dedication, and love of education as a proactive board member to make our school system even stronger. We are a family of educators with deep roots in Collier County, including my grandson in middle school. And we all know how much fun middle school was.

I want to support all of our aspiring students, talented teachers, and staff.

CCPS has made impressive gains over the last three and a half years. And this will continue with positive dedicated board members who can apply their experience from recent district challenges to the future. Do I think we can continue to improve? Of course. There is always change. But by working collaboratively, we will make even better strides in Collier County Schools. Thank you.

[00:12:04]

John Davis: Thank you, Dr. Westberry. We're moving on to the district five candidates. And we're going to start with Dr. Arthur Boyle.

Dr. Arthur Boyer: Good evening, and thank you for the opportunity. Time, results, and conditions of our schools, working conditions of our teachers, living conditions of our teachers and staff, those are the reasons why I'm running.

And it's time for some transformational leadership practices on the board. Our school board has been pretty much like a political crypt. It's time that our school board starts working to see better results. I don't need to tell you about the results; I don't need to tell you about the issues. You know them more than I do. However, in this election, we are not going to take chances with any candidate who has been leading all those failing schools. It is a problem. We're not going to take any chances with just a political platform. It is a problem, because we have too much. We're not going to take any chances with any candidate whose decision is going to be seen as a conflict-of-interest issues. We have too many to deal with, with our school board.

So, in this election, we are going to consider what needs to be done. I'm running for district five to seek, serve, defend, and protect the best interests of our students while aligning the needs, the dream, and the vision of our county.

I'm Dr. Arthur Boyer. I'm running for district five. I would appreciate your vote. Thank you.

[00:13:58]

John Davis: Thank you, Dr. Boyer. We'll now hear from Collier School Board District Five candidate, Jackie Keay.

Jackie Keay: Thank you. Good evening. My name is Jackie Keay, and I grew up here in Collier County. I am a product of the Collier County school system, and I think I turned out pretty well. So, when I look at our community, I think about an emergency room doctor as he triages his patients. There are some patients who have life-threatening wounds, and there are some patients that can wait a little bit. When I look at our school system, we're hemorrhaging as far as the students' mental health, even with the increase in Baker acts through David Lawrence. And the kids are themselves telling me that mental health is a big issue for them.

Another hemorrhage that can cause death not only to our community, our country is also our teachers. Without teachers, we cannot educate the next generation. And without education, we cannot progress. And without progression, we will not have a seat at the global table. So, my goal, as I look at the community, is ensuring that kids have the best quality education that puts them on par with the global world, as well as ensuring that teachers have the support, but also the latitude to teach. They went to school to learn to teach. Allow them to teach and to ensure that they are respected.

But ultimately, I am for students first. I love those kids very much. And I will do anything in my power to ensure that they are safe and that they have the skills and education to run our community and country when we're gone. Thank you.

[00:15:36]

John Davis: Thank you and moving over to my left, but not leaving district five, we have candidate Timothy Moshier.

Timothy Moshier: Thank you. My name is Tim Moshier. I'm running for school board district five, I started going to school board meetings a year ago, March. It all started with the mask mandate; I didn't think we should be masking our children. I started going to support that. I went to the next meeting. Come July, I didn't like what the school board was doing. I found out the budget was \$1.3 billion. We had just over 3,100 teachers and over 4,000 administrators. I thought we were there to educate our children. So, I want to know why we have more administrators and nonteaching positions than teaching positions. Then I found out our teachers are making 15% below the national average, and with a \$1.3 billion budget, we should be able to pay our teachers what they're worth.

I've also found out that almost 40% of the students aren't working on an at-level education. So, if they're not there, we're going to have problems down the road. Also, safety issues, they're doing very well with that, but we could always do better. We need to get sexually explicit materials out of there. For instance, [the Florida Citizens] Alliance has been working on that. That hasn't been happening. This present school board said no on any of this stuff. Put warning labels on it. I do not think that's right.

The superintendent, right now, I believe is running the school district. The school should be run by the school board. We're the elected officials, and the superintendent should be working for us.

I just have common sense. I spent 30 years in the trucking business and can put that common sense to work here. So, thank you for coming tonight. I'm glad to see we have more people that show up for this than we actually have to show up for our local school board meetings. Thank you.

[00:17:23]

John Davis: Thank you, sir. And Ana Turino, also a district five candidate, the floor is yours.

Ana Turino: Thank you. Good evening, everyone. Thank you all for coming. And those of you that are watching on the TV, I appreciate that. My name is Ana Turino, and I'm a mother of six - two are combat vets. I just want to tell you a little bit about myself. I widowed very young, so I'm very strong, I have a strong character, and I'm a fighter. I have two grandkids, that God willing, our school system improves so that they have a future.

Now what I want to talk to you about is our schools and our students. I am, right now, boots on the ground. I work for a nonprofit, and I mentor foster children. But I also mentor other students that principals will come to me and say, "This child needs help."

Now these are the issues I'm seeing in the schools. Teachers cannot really teach. We have different levels of students. We might have a child that's up here, but then we have exceptional students that need slower teaching forms or different teaching methods. And that is creating a problem because they're delaying the other ones, and these can't catch up. So, those are one of the major issues I'm seeing.

Also, we do have teachers doing other duties, other than teaching our students. There's a lot of pressure for teachers and they're losing that fire that they had. When I became an educator, it was because I felt the passion. We need to bring back that passion plus the passion for learning. We need to teach our kids, not just put them in front of a computer and have them learn on their own with i-Ready and all these other supplemental programs that we're using. No. Have the teacher stand up on the board and teach the students. Bring back the education we had and teach children to be problem solvers. We need to ensure our students are taught well and they can grow up and be good law-abiding citizens. Vote for me. Ana Turino, district five. Thank you.

[00:19:18]

John Davis: Thank you. And our final candidate's opening statement for the district five race is current incumbent school board member, Roy Terry.

Roy Terry: Good evening. My name is Roy Terry, and I'm running for school board in district five. I have served the students in Collier County for 44 years. I have been a teacher, a coach, an athletic director, assistant principal, principal, a school board member, and have been the board chair four times.

Why am I running? For the students. They deserve a safe, well-organized, and effective learning environment. For the teachers. They need to feel that we have their back, and they should be able to educate our students without the fear of retribution. Our parents need to feel their child is in a safe environment and are being taught by highly educated and caring teachers. Our community needs to

know that we are providing well-educated, patriotic young people who will contribute to the positive development of their community.

I promise to run a positive campaign, promoting our district successes, but also recognizing areas that we need to improve. My opponents have started some very negative and untrue advertising lately. If they think there are problems, my hope is they will stick to the facts and offer solutions. So far, I have not heard of any. Just remember, experience matters.

[00:20:48]

John Davis: Thank you. We're now moving on to opening statements for the candidates in the Collier School Board district three race, and we will begin with incumbent Jen Mitchell.

Jen Mitchell: Good evening. My name is Jen Mitchell, and I'm currently the chair of the Collier County School Board. I'm a local realtor and mother of four traditional public-school students here in Collier County. I was born and raised in Lafayette, Indiana. I attended Purdue University. I've lived here in Naples for 25 years.

I can tell you nearly four years ago, when I ran for the board, I couldn't possibly have imagined I would be serving during a pandemic and faced with all the decisions that we were. But I'm proud to say that our board put students first. And within two weeks, we quickly pivoted to online instruction. We got thousands of computers and Wi-Fi hotspots into homes all over the county. We distributed thousands of meals daily all across the county as well. And in the fall, we returned to in-person learning, again, with multiple options for our families. We made sure our students had access to clubs, sports, band, theater, and orchestra - all those very important things. And the fact is we got really good results. We achieved a record-high graduation rate of 92.7%. We outperformed the state in all 21 tested areas for the first time ever, and we maintained our district A-rating.

From a financial standpoint, we're on track to be debt free by 2026. We're paying cash for the new high school to save you \$41 million in interest payments. And we're the only district in the state to pass a tax-neutral referendum. Twenty-two other districts went back to their stakeholders to ask for more money. We didn't do that. So, I'm very proud of what we've done here in Collier County Public Schools. But we certainly have work to do. And I would say every incumbent up here would admit to that.

And the fact is, I hear the question a lot, "How can you be an A-rated district when nearly 38% of your students are not reading and doing math on grade level?" It's a challenge - no doubt about it. It's our greatest challenge. But it's not a challenge unique to Collier. In fact, statewide, that number is higher and even higher still nationally. But I'm confident we have great teachers in place that are working to meet that challenge every day, head on, in our classrooms.

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. I am a level-headed consensus builder. And I hope that I can count on your vote on August 23rd. Thank you.

[00:23:03]

John Davis: All right, thank you. And now moving on to a district three candidate Kelly Lichter.

Kelly Lichter: I'm Kelly Lichter, district three. I did serve on the Collier County School Board from 2014 to 2018 and chose not to run for re-election. I wanted to focus, primarily, my efforts on the school my husband and I founded. Over 10 years ago, we started the process. We have volunteered a great deal of our time to create what is now the top performing public school in Collier County. It's ranked in the top 1% in the state of Florida.

So, when there's talk about no solutions, I actually would disagree with that, because we have been a model here in Collier for eight years. And instead of the district looking at our success and looking at what we're doing, the focus has been on a great curriculum that doesn't change year after year. Teachers are able to focus on actual instruction versus all these other responsibilities that change year over year.

We're very proud of the success that we've had at the school. And something I feel very passionate about is I used to teach years ago but stepped out of the classroom to stay home fulltime with my two children. I've learned a lot in the in the last eight years, and I think what I bring to the table is that I'm a principled leader. I'm not a politician, and I stand firm in truth. And 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.

In my spare time I serve in a volunteer capacity for a local animal rescue, and I volunteer and coach my son's basketball team. I'm very dedicated to this community and hope I'll have another opportunity to serve the students in Collier County. Thank you.

[00:25:07]

John Davis: Thank you very much. And we'll move on to opening statements from our final candidate this evening, Jana Greer. Thank you.

Jana Greer: Thank you. Thank you all for attending this evening. My name is Jana Greer, and I'm running for Collier County District Three seat. I am a wife to my husband of almost 19 years. Together, we have six children - four girls and two boys. My oldest is a senior this year. I've been fighting for education for over 12 years. I homeschooled her up until her fourth-grade year. So, education is something that's near and dear to my heart, and I'm concerned with our current failures in our system. 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. That concerns me. It concerns me that 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'm running because I want to see those changes. And if I can't make changes from sitting in a seat, I must take a stand to help make those changes.

In my life, as far as business and career, I have been in a variety of different positions - a lot of it in customer service, but I'm currently a consultant in business and in commercial real estate. So, I have plenty of history of operations and technology and running things and organizing and making sure structure and policies are in place. And I would like to be able to bring that to this district to bring those structures and policies.

I also champion parental rights. We've seen parental rights be stripped away in counties across the state. I want to continue to see parental rights be championed and follow what our governor has done. I thank you for your time and vote for Jana Greer. Thank you.

[00:26:51]

John Davis: All right, thank you. And with the introductions complete, we'll move on to the question portion of tonight's forum. A reminder, all the candidates will have one minute to address each question. And we're going to begin with a question to the district one candidates on my far right. And we will be beginning with Kimberly Ann Boobyer. And this will be the question: **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?**

Kimberly Ann Boobyer: Well, I see our role as continuing to follow the lead that the district has already taken in this area. They have done a really great job of collaborating with the Collier County Sheriff's office to make sure that we have lots of layers of protection for our schools. One of those layers is to have single-point entries, for instance. And I would always, of course, be looking at other ways, because the more deterrence the better to keep crime out to keep guns from being a problem. But I do want to say that it's not a gun issue. And this is making sure that we have enough safety measures in place. The Collier County Sheriff's Office provides that for us, and I would continue with that while looking at other things. Thank you.

[00:28:23]

John Davis: All right, thank you. And Jerry Rutherford, same question. What do you see as the school board's role when it comes to safety on campuses?

Jerry Rutherford: We've heard many things that could be done. One of them would be to arm teachers and others. They would buy their own weapon. They would go through training. They would get in there and actually be paid for this process - hazardous duty pay. They would get a monitor that would go to the guard if something happened. All she would have to do is push a button, and he would know exactly where she is and what's happening. There are a lot of things out there. I've heard different ideas, and many of them very good.

Something happened in the 1930s with my brother. Now we're talking about the other side. What about the juveniles that need help? There was a situation back there that changed my brother's life. It can be applied today, and I would like to see it applied, but I have to have someone to go along with me and understand it.

[00:29:29]

John Davis: Thank you. Jory Westberry, same question.

Jory Westberry: I think Collier County has done an amazing job putting in safety procedures for our schools. Here are some. Kimberly mentioned the single point of entry at all schools. That's extremely important. All the doors on the outside of the school are locked. In order to get into a school, you have to show your driver's license or an ID badge from Collier County Schools. There's a video doorknob at the front, and you hold up your badge. All staff has the ability to call a code red lockdown. And

afterschool care and during the summer, there are drills in the school, and all students have ID badges. And additional training is given to school administrators, such as no backpacks or bags at athletic events. The windows are covered in the classrooms, and the classroom doors are locked in the building.

[00:30:38]

John Davis: Thank you. And we're going to go on to another question. But as a reminder, before the end of the evening, all candidates on the stage will have had an opportunity to answer that question and all of the questions tonight. But we're going to go to our district three candidates here. And we're going to start with Jana Greer and this question. 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?**

Jana Greer: So, to be in compliance with the law, we need to make sure we have a policy in place that eliminates any of that teaching [from grades] K to three. And then above that, it is to be grade- and age-appropriate. So, 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's a clear policy that comes into play that parents can report it. I would rather not face a lawsuit than handle the issue right at the board level and staff and address anybody who's going out of line from that policy.

[00:32:14]

John Davis: Thank you. And candidate, Kelly Lichter, same question. If you want me to repeat any portion of it, I can.

Kelly Lichter: Thank you; I've got it. As Ms. Greer said, it is through policy, and that's the school board's responsibility. We do need to establish policy. Anytime there is a statutory change law that comes down from Tallahassee, we do have to implement policy. But what I will say on this issue is that I do not support this agenda coming into the schools, because I'm going to have to go back to my experience with Mason. And with that experience, and having a really solid curriculum that focuses on actually teaching world history and American history, phonics, grammar, there isn't room in the day to bring in political agendas. It just doesn't have to be there. And we're missing out on educating kids and focusing on the math and the sciences, the art and the music, and so many wonderful things that have been left out of our curriculum. I just, frankly, don't think it's necessary to push any political agenda in the classroom. Thank you.

[00:33:26]

John Davis: Thank you. And Jen Mitchell, same question.

Jen Mitchell: I just actually read a headline yesterday that the board attorneys around the state are sort of scratching their heads and trying to figure out how exactly this translates into policy, based on what the different districts already have in place. We do have a controversial issues policy, currently, that

requires principal permission to teach anything that's not in these teaching standards, which this is not in the teaching standard. So, the idea that this is happening currently in Collier County classrooms is false; it's not happening. 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.

[00:34:16]

John Davis: Okay, thank you. And we're moving on to our third question. And this is going to be for our district five candidates. We're going to start with Dr. Boyer again here. And this question is **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?**

Dr. Arthur Boyer: Thank you. I do believe that our new superintendent [should be] from Collier County, somebody with the knowledge of the environment, somebody with not only the book knowledge but the knowledge of the environment, somebody who is ready to work for the best interests of Collier County without any special political agenda. That will be very important for us. And [he or she] is a someone with transformational skills ready to serve, defend, and protect the best interests of our students all together with Collier County. That is that is going to be my choice. That is somebody that I would support.

[00:35:40]

John Davis: Thank you. And Jackie Keay, same question. What would you consider the responsibilities and duties of an elected school board member as well as an incoming new superintendent?

Jackie Keay: Okay, so thinking students first, we would want the school board members not only to educate the families but to also educate the community about what the school board does and how they can be a part of that process. And an important part of a school board member's job is to hire a qualified superintendent. So, a superintendent, to me, would be someone who is not only inclusive but is innovative and has a vision for the community and looking at opportunities to transform education, especially as it relates to the trades, looking at opportunities when kids graduate, that they have a job and that they're able to support themselves and be a contributing member of our society as well as our community. Thank you.

[00:36:39]

John Davis: Thank you. And Timothy Moshier, same question.

Timothy Moshier: Well, I'd love to see a superintendent focus more on the almost 40% of the kids that are failing. Right now, if you go to the school board meeting, according the superintendent, everyone is great. Only about 10% to 15% of the people are great. I need them to focus on the 40% that are failing and bring those people up - get back to phonics, basic education, basic reading skills, math skills, and just pull those people up and focus on that. Right now, I don't see that happening. And that's where the superintendent needs to focus on and bring the community closer together and then listen to what the parents have to say, and then just basically work on our education system. That's it.

[00:37:27]

John Davis: Ana Turino.

Ana Turino: As a school board member, I think all school board members should listen to the concerned citizens and the parents when they bring an issue up to the board. And I honestly feel that they should receive a response at the moment or within 24 hours or some type of communication so they know they're not being ignored. I also feel that, as a school board member, we need to be boots on the ground. I have seen, firsthand, how certain schools are not abiding by what we have written in policy, for lack of a better term. With regards to the superintendent, I feel they should be someone that has had a position in the school system and knows the ins and outs of every single position in the schools so they know what is needed for a school system and be able to communicate with the parents and with the teachers and everyone involved with our school system. Thank you.

[00:38:28]

John Davis: Thank you. And Roy Terry.

Roy Terry: First of all, the duties of a school board member is to provide organization and a mission for the school district. Also, to be supporting and reviewing the superintendent, do observations and critiques, monitoring finances with a school district, listen well to the concerns of others. And were you able to work with others? Because the school board is an organization that works together. And when you work together, you get things done. I'd like to see a superintendent that works well with others, is trustworthy, knows the Florida law, which I think is very important. Because a law in Florida is a lot different than law in other states around the nation. I also think they should be organized and show that they work well with the community. I think the superintendent we have now has gone to extreme lengths to do that. Thank you.

[00:39:32]

John Davis: Thank you very much. We're now moving on to another question, and we're going to move back to our district one candidates. This time, I'm going to start with Jory Westberry. And the question is 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. And 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?**

Jory Westberry: I couldn't agree more about teacher salaries. I think it's pitiful that we don't have the highest salary schedule in the nation. It's very emotional for me. We have a great school district, and we have great teachers. They need to have autonomy, and they need to have the guidance and the instruction that they require. I have to talk about the superintendent. The superintendent should have a K-to-12 background, advanced degrees if they are in the education field, integrity, communication skills, and works fairly with all people. Did I make it?

[00:41:32]

John Davis: That's fine. You don't have to go over the minute. That's fine. Jeremy Rutherford, I'm going pose that same question to you regarding Florida's low ranking when it comes to teacher pay overall, and what, as a school board member, you would want to do to address teacher pay and retention in Collier County?

Jerry Rutherford: Well, I believe with a \$1.385 billion budget, there should have been plenty of place to put the teachers' pay where it should be. And in Naples, as you know, this is a very wealthy community, it's very difficult to find places. And I think that the school board should have put that as a high priority, especially when they're paying a lot of the administration very high salaries. I think that they could have put it in the budget to do better than that. So, I'm for teacher pay. And I believe that we need to do something about it. I have a plan. I don't tell you what my plan is, because if I put it out there, then everybody is going to know about it. I have a plan for increasing the teachers' pay. And so, I want to implement it, but I can't implement it on the outside, and I'm not going to share it on the outside.

[00:42:48]

John Davis: Okay, and Kimberly Ann Boobyer, same question.

Kimberly Ann Boobyer: Teacher salaries are not set for the community they live in. Salaries are negotiated by the teachers' unions. And our school board has approved the union contract every time it has been presented. I support good teachers. I support good pay for good teachers that have good track records and produce good results. We do need to do more for our good teachers. As a school board member, I would evaluate administrative staff positions relative to the ratio of teachers and staff related to running all the schools. We currently have approximately 7,000 employees of which 3,200 are teachers. I would increase teacher salaries whenever possible, because I fully support good teachers.

[00:43:38]

John Davis: Thank you very much. And now we're going to move back over to our district three candidates, all the way on my far left here, for this next question. And this time, we are going to start with Jen Mitchell. The question is **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. What role should members of the school board play in this process? 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?**

Jen Mitchell: There actually is a process in place that was legislated. Prior to legislation passing, we were working on it here in Collier. I do not support taking books out of circulation just on a whim. I think if an objection is filed, if that book is deemed to be sexually graphic and explicit-- and believe me, there are some that are-- that book should then be set behind the counter or in a back room, and parent permission should be required. I'm talking about books like Kite Runner, Angela's Ashes, some really great books that are required for AP learning. It's not for me to say.

The governor has made clear that he supports parent rights. And so, it's not for me 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. Hopefully, some of you signed up 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.

[00:45:25]

John Davis: Thank you very much. And Kelly Lichter, same question.

Kelly Lichter: Thank you. I know this issue has become a real a hot item for a lot of parents that are following the school board races, not just here locally, but across the country. Back when I was on the board, this was an issue. There was a parent who came to a school board meeting, and during his public comment, read from a book that was found in a middle school media center. It was so explicit and graphic. It wasn't even a read-between-the-lines scenario; I'll put it that way. It was embarrassing. The board chair stopped the member of the public from reading further because it was so bad. However, because he had his three minutes, he was allowed to continue on. Ultimately, the board majority voted in favor of these kinds of books. The way I see it, if it's questionable material, these don't belong in schools. We're dealing with minors. These are children under the age of 18. Thank you.

[00:46:23]

John Davis: Thank you. And Jana Greer, same question.

Jana Greer: So, parental right is definitely a part of my platform. I want to focus on allowing parents to have the say of what their kids can learn. Currently, Florida statute actually bans pornographic materials from our students. So, that should not even be a question from the get go. It shouldn't even be making it through our media center gateway, whoever selected those books. There needs to be a clear selection process from the beginning so that protects our students from those materials in this first place. Then we wouldn't have parental objections. Now I understand from AP classes, there are books that have questionable things, and some parents may agree with that. 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.

[00:47:11]

John Davis: Thank you very much. And now we're turning things back to our district five candidates. I'm going to start on this side of the room. So, I'll be getting with you, Mr. Terry, on this question. And it's what do you envision to be the role of the school board when it comes to say-- oh, excuse me. We are back to that question. This is the school safety question. **What do you envision the school board's role to be when it comes to safety on campuses, particularly in light of recent incidences of gun violence that we've seen?**

Roy Terry: Of course, we all have to realize that safety in schools is probably the most important issue, in this day and age, on children's, parents' and the community's mind. It's very, very important that we, as a school board in the district, provide a safe environment for education to occur. Presently, we have an excellent contract with the sheriff's department that places deputies in all of our schools. I am not for providing guns for teachers and others in the schools. I think the deputies can handle that situation.

We do have single point of entry. All of our facilities are fenced in. And I think that we are pretty well prepared with outdoor locks on the doors to take care of that and provide safety. I feel very confident with what we're doing here in Collier County, that we're providing the safety things necessary to provide an excellent educational opportunity for our students.

[00:48:40]

John Davis: Thank you. And Ana Turino, same question.

Ana Turino: I think what we are doing right now is great, but I honestly feel we should be doing more. If somebody really wants to cause the damage because they're mentally unstable, they will. The sheriff does walk around making sure all the doors are locked. But if someone takes their truck in and goes through the fence, nobody can stop him. So, I am thinking that we should look into other programs like The Guardian Program in other counties and see how that can benefit us.

Also, that one point of entry, again, if somebody really wants to make it into the school, they can shoot the lock down and go in. Notice that only gun-free safe zones are the ones that are attacked. So, we really need to revisit this question as to if the teacher already has a concealed carry, are they responsible enough to carry and protect our kids? Look at the response time for our sheriff's office? What is it - seven minutes? A lot of damage can be done. We really need to revisit this in order to protect our teachers and our students and our staff. Thank you.

[00:49:48]

John Davis: Thank you very much. The floor is yours, Timothy Moshier.

Timothy Moshier: Well, being in the trucking business for 30 years, I had a lot of places I went into. We have a turnstile that only goes one way. I think all the schools need to have that so people can get out of the schools, but they can't get back in. I've been to many schools where they have the locked doors, but if someone opens it up and leaves, someone else can come in. It's like going into an apartment building. That happens in numerous places. I've seen that at different schools, so we need turnstiles to get in.

Also, The Guardian Program is very good. There's usually one, maybe two sheriff's police officers/law enforcement officers at the schools. If someone's going to do something, they're going to wait for the sheriff to move to the other side, and they're going to start at one end. The Guardian Program, if it's published, that's a big deterrent. I mean, the only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun. So, I'm for that. And that's pretty much it. Thank you.

[00:50:39]

John Davis: Thank you. Jackie. Keay, same question.

Jackie Keay: Thank you. Since this is a systemic problem, we need a systemic change in regulation. I was in the military. Before you could even get a weapon or join the military, you had to do a background check. And before they would even put a weapon in your hand, you had to go through weapons training. So, I feel like that should be a part of the process. And also, again, everything boils down to education. We have young kids who are playing with weapons who are killing themselves, killing their parents, and we need to educate them as well. But again, school board members need to connect to the community

to provide education, insight, and knowledge. That's an important role that we have in the community. Thank you.

[00:51:27]

John Davis: Thank you. And Dr. Boyer, you're the final candidate on this question.

Dr. Arthur Boyer: From 1970 to the last school shooting, we have registered about 6,000 school shootings right here in the U.S. That is a very serious issue. And that means we have failed so many kids and our students that go to school to learn, enjoy, and be ready for tomorrow but not to die. Unfortunately, it has been more about politics, instead of solving the problem. There is no budget limit to protect our elected officials. There shouldn't be any budget limit, either, to protect our children. So, I think that it's great what we are doing in Collier County, but we need to work closer with local law enforcement officials and give our officials the authority to act to serve and protect our children. They go to school to learn, but not to be assassinated.

[00:52:32]

John Davis: All right. Thank you, Dr. Boyer. And with that, we're going to move on, and we're going to head back to our district one candidates. This time, Mr. Rutherford, I'll begin with you. And this is a question that we have heard already tonight. But in late March, Governor Ron DeSantis signed into law, the parental rights and education bill that's been dubbed the "don't say gay" bill by opponents. Supporters say it's meant to allow parents to determine when and in what way to introduce LGBTQ topics to their children. Opponents argue that it will hurt LGBTQ children. **As a member of the school board, how would you hope to balance compliance with the new law and what's in the best interest of all children in the district?**

Jerry Rutherford: First of all, parents have rights. That's their children. And if they don't want something in the schools that they feel like it's not right for their children, there are a number of options. We homeschooled our last two children. But there are other means. Repeat the first part of that question, please.

John Davis: Should I just repeat it?

Jerry Rutherford: No. It's on the rights bill, right?

John Davis: Yes, the Parental Rights in Education bill.

Jerry Rutherford: Okay. They do have rights, and I think they should be respected. Now there used to be PTA meetings. School boards are still around, and why they don't get involved that way, I don't know. But I think the parents need to take a more active part in going to the school boards and PTAs and changing things. I think it would be much to their advantage.

[00:54:08]

John Davis: All right. Thank you, sir. And Dr. Westberry, I'll turn that question to you now.

Jory Westberry: Our governor has had insights into several good things. And one of them was to deter teachers from teaching about lesbian/gay issues in K to three, and that law was passed. And so, if we allowed anything like that to go on, which we wouldn't, we would be at fault. So, we're not going to do

that. And, yes, parents have, absolutely, rights, and the communication is important. On a civil level, I would hope to discuss those factors with us and have us reach good conclusions.

[00:55:03]

John Davis: Thank you very much. And Kimberly Ann Boobyer.

Kimberly Ann Boobyer: I firmly believe in parents' rights, and CCPS does acknowledge that there can be no discrimination on the basis of race, sex, etc. They do follow state statutes. CCPS handles the issue of transgender students on a case-by-case basis, inclusive of student, parent, principal, discussion, and determination of procedures to be followed. The new law that affects LGBTQ students will go into effect July 1st. This law will not permit athletes of a different biological sex to compete against each other or in the same sport.

I am confident that CCPS will enforce the new law, stating that zero talk will be permitted in grades K through three regarding sexual orientation and gender identity. CCPS has dealt with noncompliance with teachers on a case-by-case basis and will continue to do so in reference to any LGBTQ issues. As a school board member, I will work actively to ensure that this compliance to this new law continues to stay in place. Thank you.

[00:56:11]

John Davis: Thank you very much. And we're going to be moving back to our district three candidates. And this time, I'm going to be starting with Kelly Lichter, because you've been in the middle every time no matter what. And so, this question, again, goes back to **how would you characterize the duties and responsibilities of an elected county school board member? And given that this next school board is going to be selecting a new superintendent, what qualities would you be looking for in that person?**

Kelly Lichter: I think the most important duty of a school board member is really to get back to focusing on academic achievement. I think if you watch the school board meetings, that is a major piece that's missing. When it comes to the next superintendent qualities that I would look for, that would be 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. And this is going to require policy changes, because a lot of policy changes have been made to give up a lot of the authority by the school board members to the superintendent. As an elected official, we represent the people, and that needs to change. So, thank you.

[00:57:32]

John Davis: Thank you and Jana Greer.

Jana Greer: The school board is the policymaker. The fiduciary responsibility also stops with them. So, our responsibility to bring in the new superintendent who will be considered like the CEO, from my viewpoint, it needs to be 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.

[00:58:11]

John Davis: Thank you very much. Oh, yes, of course, Jen Mitchell. I was about to move on. Apologies.

Jen Mitchell: That's okay. Thank you. So, essentially, the role of a school board member boils down to the following three things - hire, fire, and evaluate the superintendent, set district policy, and oversee the budget. That's really what it boils down to. As Ms. Greer said, the superintendent is in charge of the operation. He's the CEO, if you will, and we're the Board of Trustees.

And, for me, I think it's important that the next superintendent has a strategic vision for increasing student achievement. I think that person needs to be an excellent communicator, community minded, as well as fiscally responsible. And I think it's really important, too, that we keep in mind that when this job gets posted, when the RFP goes out, and we start getting candidates, they're going to be paying very close attention to who's sitting on the board. Because those are going to be their bosses. And we're not going to attract great candidates if we don't have competent leadership on the board. So, I think that's important for the community to think about when they cast their vote August 23rd.

[00:59:14]

John Davis: All right, thank you very much. And this next question is going to, once again, be posed to our district five candidates. And this time, I'm going to be starting with Jackie Keay. And this was that question related to teacher pay. I won't read the whole thing again, unless you would care for me to.

Jackie Keay: Yes, please.

John Davis: Okay, I'll read the entire question. Data released in April by the National Education Association shows that despite efforts by the Florida Legislature to improve teachers' starting pay, Florida remains near the bottom in a ranking of average teacher pay. In 2020, the Florida Legislature enacted a plan to increase teachers' starting salary to \$47,500 a year, and as a result starting teacher pay in Florida increased in a national ranking from 30th to 16th place, but that 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 should the school board be working on this issue regarding teacher pay and retention?**

Jackie Keay: What I've been doing over the last year is advocating for housing affordability. So, even if you were to increase a teacher's pay, if they cannot afford to pay rent or pay a mortgage in Collier County, that pay raise is moot. So, what I would recommend is as a school board member to continue advocating for the superintendent, whoever that may be, to be online with creating or building workforce housing. We have prime property communities like Miami and California, as well as Colorado. They are building workforce housing on school property. We have enough money. We're going to be debt free. There's no reason why we shouldn't do that. Thank you.

[01:01:02]

John Davis: Thank you. And Timothy Moshier, I'll turn to you now.

Timothy Moshier: Well, since we do have just over 3,100 teachers and over 4,000 administrators, I'd like to use some of that money, and switch it over to maybe 5% and start working your way there every year

and moving it over to teachers' pay. And just work on that. I mean, we have a \$1.3 billion budget. If you do the simple math, charter schools get around \$8,000 per student. In Collier County, if you just did the simple math, round it up to 10,000 or 15,000 students, that's half a billion dollars a year. Our budget is \$1.3 billion. That gives us \$800 million to use for teachers' pay and other things that we need. The money is there; we just have to allocate it correctly and watch it.

I've been in the trucking business where I always have to watch our dimes and our pennies and see where everything goes, because it's a nickel and dime business. And we should be able to do that with the school system and be able to get our teachers more competitive pay and get them up there and get the quality teachers that we need.

[01:02:04]

John Davis: Thank you. And Dr. Arthur Boyer.

Dr. Arthur Boyer: Talking about the working conditions of our teachers, I've been an educator myself for 18 years. I've been there, and it is a shame that our teachers, our everyday heroes are being treated just like that. They have to depend on the union to fight for them and all that. That is not the way we value teachers. They have done too much. And I do think that, as a board member, I would reconsider some administrative positions and some administrative salary also, because we cannot have the best schools, the best students, we cannot talk about success for the future if we are not taking care of our teachers. So, it is very important to take care of our teachers to value them and honor our teachers.

[01:02:54]

John Davis: Thank you, Dr. Boyer. And Ana Turino.

Ana Turino: I strongly feel that we really need to revisit the budget. I don't think it's an efficient budget. We need to revisit and look at the salaries that we all have in the district. We have a lot of allocations for certain items in the budget, which I wonder where that money is turned into after the fact that it's not being used. So, I really think we need to revisit it and allocate, move around the budget so that we can give teachers raises. I think the median income right now in Collier County was at \$108,000. Don't quote me, because I have not looked at it recently. But we really need to revisit so we can make it a place where they can live and be happy to be able to go into the classrooms, because that reflects on their character. And you can't work unless you're happy.

[01:03:52]

John Davis: Thank you. And Mr. Terry.

Roy Terry: There are a couple of things. First of all, we're going to be debt free and 2026, which should allow us to have some money left to be able to provide that for more teacher pay. Also, we're having a new high school open up, and it's going to save us \$41 million because we're going to pay cash for that high school. So, I think we can find some money there in the next couple of years.

As far as affordable housing goes, the school board, at their last meeting, announced a plan to use property down by Manatee to create modular housing for new teachers coming into the district at a lower rent. My contention is, is that teachers can make the payments. The problem is the down payment. And if we give them an opportunity to move down here, live in a modular home, save money,

they'll be able to save enough after four or five years to be able to move out. I thought that because we provide about 40 trailer homes on our campuses now for deputies, which is the same idea. And after about five years, they move out into the community. Thank you.

[01:05:01]

John Davis: Thank you, sir. I'm heading back to our district one candidates for our next question. And again, I'll be starting with Kimberly Ann Boobyer. This question for the parents' and the community's role in selecting school materials. I'll just go ahead and read it again. Local school district officials all over Florida are now engaging with the impact of new education legislation that allows parents to have more input on 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. **What role should members of the school board play in this process? And what metric would you apply to determine if a request to remove certain books or materials should be followed or whether or not students should have access?**

Kimberly Ann Boobyer: The current school board members have been dealing with this issue since last October. They have relegated the discussion, solution, and process to Mr. Fishbane, General Counsel. An objection procedure has been developed, and currently, CCPS is seeking participants for the objection committee. And as a school board member, I would want to ensure that parents are a part of that selection process for that committee, because parent involvement is key here. And then I would also want to pose the question, do we really need these books in our media centers? Do they really add to the value of quality academic education? Do they enrich and add beauty to our students' lives? So, that should be taken into consideration when going through these books.

[01:06:42]

John Davis: Thank you. And Dr. Westbury, your response.

Jory Westberry: We presently have a process for parents to bring concerns to a committee. The committee is made up of parents and teachers and, I think, some administrators. I'm not quite sure about that one. But it's a good dialogue. There are rubrics for people to work on. And we're asking for whoever has a complaint to put it in writing, tell us the page so that we can get the committee going and analyze those issues and get them taken care of.

[01:07:26]

John Davis: Thank you. And Jerry Rutherford, same question.

Jerry Rutherford: I've been going to school board meetings for over 35 years. There was a time many years ago, many decades ago now, where the banning of books and movies and so forth came out. If you remember, NYPD Blue was something that some felt should be banned. Well, I got together with a bunch of guys that were on both sides. We debated the thing. And we finally came to the realization that, yes, certain things should be banned. And I read some of the books that were here just recently. I wouldn't want my grown children reading them. Because it had to do a suicide, murder, rape and everything else. I'm sorry, but I'll be on the side of putting morals and values back in the school system, like the founders established.

[01:08:23]

John Davis: Thank you, Mr. Rutherford. Now, we're moving back to our district three candidates - and Jen Mitchell, I'm going to start with you. This is the school safety question. **What is the school board's role in addressing or preventing incidences of gun violence on school campuses?**

Jen Mitchell: I think, ultimately, our role is a multitude of things. It's 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. You notice the Nicholas Cruz situation on the other coast. He was a student who had been expelled from schools. Collier County Public Schools does not expel students; we alternately place them so that they're not out on the streets and looking for trouble.

And then again, with regard to governance, auditing our processes to make sure that we are complying with state statutes. The governor made very clear it was his priority after Parkland, that we would have the resources necessary to have deputies in our schools-- which as you know, we've had for over 40 years-- as well as to be able to address mental health needs. And so, we've been able to use the budget to increase staffing in terms of school psychologists, licensed clinical social workers, and those types of things.

[01:09:43]

John Davis: Thank you. And Jana Greer.

Jana Greer: The school board should be making sure our schools are absolutely secure for our students. There shouldn't be a question about that. What I would like to see, on top of the student resource officers that are on campus, who are armed, I would like to see more of a connectivity from a security standpoint within the schools, where there would be instant, in either from video camera or in a call box-- there are examples in other cities that have done it-- there's an instant connectivity if there ever is an issue within the school so that there's a quicker response time from our sheriff's department so they can be in and address the issue.

They can buy cameras; they can 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. Mental health is definitely an issue in the country. So, I think making sure that those processes and programs are being effectively used through that funding is important as well.

[01:10:42]

John Davis: All right, thank you very much. And Kelly Lichter.

Kelly Lichter: Well, I do want to give credit to the Collier County School District and the partnership with the CCSO. I think that's been tremendous in terms of safety, but a couple of things I would want to focus on - and this is policy - but it's about student decorum and discipline in the schools. I think our standards have dropped significantly. And we're not seeing this just here in Collier; this is happening all across the country. We do have to raise the standards of the expectations of the way students behave, how they treat their friends and peers, but also the respect towards their teachers.

And I would like to take this a step further. Also, I think we need to ensure that our policies are in place that if we are seeing red flags with a student, things aren't being swept under the rug, that things are

being reported so that we can identify students that may have some serious mental issues. I just want to make sure we're firm on that. Thank you.

[01:11:45]

John Davis: Thank you very much. And we're now going to be moving back to our district five candidates. This pertains to the Parental Rights in Education law. In late March Governor Ron DeSantis, signed into law the Parental Rights in Education bill dubbed by opponents 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. Opponents argue it would be hurtful to LGBTQ children. **As a member of the school board, how would you hope to balance compliance with this new law and what's in the best interests of all our children in the district?** Ana Turino, I'll start with you.

Ana Turino: I think that that should be left up to the parents when to discuss and bring up the LGBTQ subject, I do not think that is something that should be brought up in the schools. There is 4% of the community that is part of the LGBTQ. Therefore, I honestly do not think that that is something that should be discussed in the schools. If the question comes up, I honestly think that the child should be referred to their parents, and they can have a discussion at that point. But I do not think that that is something that the teacher or anybody in the school system should speak to the child about.

[01:13:04]

John Davis: And I'd like to move on to Timothy Moshier.

Timothy Moshier: Well, I really don't like the [HB]1557 "" Don't Say Gay". I think it should go all the way through elementary school, have the parents opt in, not opt out. My grandson is going to enter the third grade. He doesn't care about anything like that. And why bring that up to the children? Keep it out of there. Maybe opt in when you get to junior high, and let the parents make the decision. It's the parents' child, and they should have the right to determine what they want. And that's pretty much it.

[01:13:39]

John Davis: And Mr. Terry.

Roy Terry: Yeah, first of all, let me say that we don't, in the elementary schools and middle schools, we don't have sex education being taught at either those levels. We start sex ed in the high schools with the health course. And there are about five lessons in that course that discuss sexual education. But two weeks prior to that, the letter is sent home to parents where they can opt out so they know ahead of time that it's coming up and that they can opt out if they so desire. I think that, as I said, the agenda is not being taught in the schools.

But I think we also have to realize that we support all the students in Collier County. When you're on the school board, you're not supporting just one group or another group. You support all the students. It's a public education, and I think it's very important that we understand that going in.

[01:14:38]

John Davis: Thank you. And district five candidate, Arthur Boyer.

Dr. Arthur Boyer: I do believe that all students matter. And as a school board member, I will work hard to avoid any targeting policies that would create even more division in our school system. And if we take politics out, sometimes, we make schools the learning environment that it needs to be. I'm pretty sure we will see more success in people, and we are going to create a very much better environment, also, that matters and let parents decide. Yes, parental rights. Yes, I understand that. And I also support the parental engagement and parental involvement. Thank you.

[01:15:30]

John Davis: Thank you. And Jackie Keay.

Jackie Keay: So, students first. Number one, the word balance. Balance means parents have a right to educate their children and have some input but not to dictate. One of my biggest concerns is for kids who have been sexually abused, whether it's in their home or whether it's due to sex trafficking. If that child shows any indication that something is wrong, or they're questioning their identity, then that teacher is required to report it to the parent who may very well be that person who was abusing the child. That child would be less likely to report any acts of abuse.

So, we have to be careful in the laws and legislations that we promote, because it is causing further damage. And there's a report of more LGBTQIA students being not only harassed but bullied and being told to kill themselves. That's unacceptable. So, we have to have balance.

[01:16:29]

John Davis: All right, thank you very much. And heading back to our district one candidates. This question again, pertains to **your characterization of the duties and responsibilities of an elected school board member. And since this coming school board is going to be selecting the next superintendent, what qualities would you be looking for in that person?** And I'm going to begin with Jerry Rutherford.

Jerry Rutherford: Did you say what characters?

John Davis: Yes. How would you characterize the duties and responsibilities of an elected county school board member? And what qualities would you be looking for in the selection of a new superintendent?

Jerry Rutherford: For a new school board superintendent, I would be looking for honesty, integrity, ability to work with the school board. As a matter of fact, I've been there long enough to see quite a few little scuffles with the school board and the superintendent. We need to have not only a good rapport with them, but they need to know what the problems are here before they get here so that they'll know how to attack it.

So, one of the qualities that I will say is what would you do with the problems we're now faced with? And I would want to have an answer for that. I look for a person that has a track record of their own, wherever they are coming from. I would look for a good background check and things of that sort. Education is important in the sense that we need to get rid of the illiteracy, and it's very possible to do that with the right kind of teaching.

[01:18:12]

John Davis: Thank you very much. And Kimberly Ann Boobyer, same question.

Kimberly Ann Boobyer: Well, the role of the board is to determine policies and programs necessary for the district's efficient operation, after receiving, reviewing, and considering recommendations submitted to it by the superintendent. So, we are the governance of the district. And then the superintendent falls in line under that. And I think, as school board members, we need to remember that we need to work with diplomacy and have respect for our other board members along with respect for the superintendent. We need to all work well together.

Now going over to the superintendent, I think that I would want to be looking for qualities of leadership, integrity, knowledge, loyalty, decisiveness, and initiative. I would like a team builder, an excellent communicator, someone that's good at building morale among her staff, community liaison, and a visionary. And I would like someone that's going to be focused on academic excellence and student achievement, fiscal responsibility, financial prudence, HR retention, and effective staffing.

[01:19:20]

John Davis: Thank you. And Joy Westberry.

Jory Westberry: I have to agree with all of these characteristics that have been brought up already. I think that the superintendent needs to have policy and budget oversight, needs to direct the board into ways to improve, and to provide the in-service and training that the board may need. The superintendent should have an experience at K12, should have a background in education, have integrity, and communicate fairly with all.

[01:20:04]

John Davis: All right, thank you very much. And now moving back to our district three candidates, and the question I'm posing to you is the one concerning teacher pay and retention. If any of you would like me to read it in full, I'm happy to do so again.

Female Candidate: Yes, go ahead.

[01:20:18]

John Davis: Okay, thank you. Data released in April by the National Education Association shows that despite efforts by the Florida Legislature to improve teacher pay, Florida remains near the bottom at a ranking of average teacher pay. In 2020, the state legislature enacted a plan to increase teacher starting salary to \$47,500 a year. As a result, starting teacher pay in Florida increased in a national ranking from 30th to 16th place, but that plan does little to help experienced teachers. Overall, Florida's average teacher pay ranking stands in 48th place in the nation. This plus Collier County's well-documented, affordable housing crisis could make the region a difficult one for teachers to both work and live in. **How should the school board be working on this issue regarding teacher pay and retention?** And Jana Greer, I'll start with you.

Jana Greer: The school board should be focusing on giving a livable wage to our teachers. We need to focus on retention of our excellent teachers. Without a livable wage, we're not going to retain those excellent teachers. So, I do know that our governor has done as much as making a minimum increase. But we've also allocated, even as a district, to give our experienced teachers increase as well. So, if we can, from a budget standpoint, look at where we can move funding, cut expenses in other areas to help increase those annual wages to give a livable wage to our teachers, that should be 100% the focus.

[01:21:49]

John Davis: Thank you very much. And Kelly Lichter.

Kelly Lichter: I do think we have made improvements with teacher pay. I think we do need to go a step further. One of the things I would suggest is we really need to take a serious look at the budget and really audit our administrative staff. I know since I left in 2018, there have been several newly-created positions. And these are very high-paying positions.

One thing I will say is that a lot of teachers actually don't leave because of the pay. Many of them come in knowing that the profession doesn't pay as much as they should. But it's about job satisfaction. And when so many extra burdens of responsibilities are placed on teachers year after year, they're exhausted, they're stressed out, and they don't have the resources at the school level. And instead, we've got so many people at the admin building that are disconnected from the actual students and teachers in the classrooms. And I think that's something we, as a board, need to change significantly. Thank you.

[01:22:55]

John Davis: All right. And Jen Mitchell.

Jen Mitchell: I could not agree with Ms. Lichter more actually, because pay is not the primary issue when you talk to teachers. It's up there, but it's not the primary issue. It's exactly as she stated, which is lack of job satisfaction, heaping more and more on their plate, expectations. One of the simple things that you can do as a board member is to send the directive - and I believe our board has - not one more new initiative going into this next school year. Give our teachers a breath. I believe the superintendent is abiding by that, and I'm grateful to her for that.

In terms of pay, since I've been on the board in 2018, we have increased pay across all pay schedules - not just teachers - by 16%. And this particular governor has increased the teacher pay more than any other since I've lived here for 25 years - over \$200 million in the last three years for teacher pay. And Collier County actually addressed the issue of veteran teachers. So, we made sure that our veteran teachers got a bump when our new teachers got a bump as well. So, again, we're never going to be able to pay them what they're worth. But there are a lot of things that we can do to improve, no doubt about it.

[01:24:04]

John Davis: Thank you. And our district five candidates, this question goes to you. Local school district officials all over Florida are now engaging with the impact of new education legislation allowing parents to have more input and what sorts of materials are available to students in school libraries. House Bill 1467 gives parents, and anyone from the public, more access to the process of selecting and removing books and instructional materials. **What role should members of the school board play in this process? And what metrics would you apply in determining when or not to follow a request to remove a certain book or material from a school library?** And I'll begin with you, Timothy Moshier.

Timothy Moshier: Well, I'd like to see more community input. Just a few weeks ago - or the last session - they had some, as what the newspaper said, elderly people showing up for the school board meeting that got involved. And I think it's better to have people that don't have kids in the schools, because they

actually have time to go through and read the books and make the determination of what should be out there and what should not be out there. So, I'd like to see more community input and have the school board listen to what they have to say and be able to review the books. I think if the community gets more involved with the books, then bring it to the school board's attention, then they should be able to listen to a little bit more about what they have to do.

[01:25:31]

John Davis: Thank you very much. And Ana Turino.

Ana Turino: Absolutely. I agree that there should be more community involvement. But the only problem I see is that if you have parents coming from a Hispanic background, how are we going to accommodate our Haitian community or our Hispanic community? How are they going to be able to review these books? So, it would be magnificent if we could have interpreters or something while they're reviewing the books. It's equality for everybody; every single parent in our community is able to look at these books and make any objections if there is one. And as a board member, I would like to be involved, as well, and participate and attend and speak to the concerned citizens or the parents. Thank you.

[01:26:16]

John Davis: Thank you. And Jackie Keay.

Jackie Keay: Students first. One of the things I would like to do is include students in this process, because they're the ones who are going to be getting educated on the book, so they should be included in the process. One of the things I've done as a candidate is going into various community, connecting to parents. There is a channel partnership with places like Grace Place, the Community Foundation, Champions for Learning that already have these relationships with the parents and the students. School board members can attend these meetings, connect, and disseminate information as needed. So, I feel like parents, teachers, students should all have a part in this process, and a metrics for it would be like movies. If you can rate a movie G, PG13, why not rate books that way? And that way, it's put in the appropriate hands of the students who would read it. Thank you.

[01:27:15]

John Davis: Thank you. And Roy Terry.

Roy Terry: I think the school district has been listening to the community and to parents. And I would also stress that it's not just parents. It is community that can object to these books. But I think that we've got a process in place that can handle this. We've got advertisement out now for people who want to serve on that committee, and they're certainly welcome to do that. It's to be made up of community members, teachers, administrators, and parents. They will all make up the committee. And they'll review all the books and come back with a representative reply in terms of whether they should be eliminated or not.

I'm against removing them immediately from the library. A few years ago, some people complained about the Dr. Seuss books in the elementary school. And I think that would have to go before the committee before you would take it out of there. So, I would be all for leaving the books in there until the committee has a chance to look at them and make a recommendation.

[01:28:22]

John Davis: Thank you very much. And Dr. Arthur Boyer.

Dr. Arthur Boyer: School board members have to be community advocates. And as a school board member, I do believe - not yet; still to come, because I'm not a school board member - I do believe that school board members need to be community advocates because schools are a community asset. It is important that the whole community get involved - parents, teachers, students, and specifically, board members, because we are the community advocates. We need to go out there, talk to people, get people involved as much as we can, because we are the voice of the community when it comes to school board members.

[01:29:18]

John Davis: All right, thank you very much. And that does conclude the portion of our forum today with the questions that have been pre-approved and vetted by WGCU, the Naples Area Board of Realtors, as well as Naples Better Government. So, now we're going to move on to the portion where each of the candidates on stage today will have an opportunity to give a **one-minute final closing statement**. And since we began the opening statements on this end, we're going to do things in reverse. So I'm going to start with Jana Greer, who is over here on my far left, and she, of course, is a candidate in the district three race for Collier County School Board.

Jana Greer: Yes, thank you for moderating. I appreciate it. And thank everybody for coming out this evening and for those who are watching on broadcast. It is important to take a note of our education system. We have gone too far in our country, and without educating our kids who are our future, we won't have one. So, I ask that you continue to stay engaged. I am a parent, a mom of six. I'm a businesswoman. I'm active in education and their education. I want to make a difference in our community for all of our students. So, thank you. And please vote for Jana Greer.

[01:30:30]

John Davis: Thank you. And Kelly Lichter. I will never get it wrong again.

Kelly Lichter: Thank you. Thank you for moderating, and thank you all for being here tonight. And if you're tuning in online, thank you. I just want to say that, as you could see tonight, or as you've heard, everybody sitting up here is very passionate about education. They're passionate about our community.

But one thing that's very different is that we have different philosophies, we have different principles, and ideas. And some are very confused really about their role as a school board member. And I've said this at other forums, but the school board members, we're the elected officials, we represent the people to the administration. We don't represent the administration to the people.

I think when you're making a decision on August 23rd, you need to look at who actually has a track record. If you want the status quo and what's been going on, then vote for the incumbents. But if you're looking for some change, you can't keep doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. So, vote for Kelly Lichter on August 23rd. Thank you.

[01:31:43]

John Davis: All right. And our final district three candidate, Jen Mitchell.

Jen Mitchell: Yes, thank you so much for the opportunity to be here this evening. Thank you, also for moderating. As I mentioned earlier, I am the only district three candidate with children in our traditional public schools. My only agenda is to ensure that the district delivers the very best education possible to all Collier County students. This district serves every student who walks through our doors, whether or not they speak English, whether or not they have special needs, whether or not they look like us, worship like us, or vote like us.

The district certainly has its challenges with 54% of students who go home to households where English is not the primary language and 64% of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch. But these are not challenges that the district shies away from. I am a competent leader with the communication skills to build consensus and continue the forward progress of our A-rated district. It has been the honor of my lifetime to serve the students and families of Collier County. Please vote for me again on August 23rd. Thank you.

[01:32:41]

John Davis: Thank you. And now moving on to closing statements from our district five candidates beginning with Roy Terry.

Roy Terry: Schools are a beautiful place. They are a miniature community of young people of all races, socio-economic levels, religious groups, and political affiliations. The nice thing is most of the students get along together, they care for each other, and work and live together. For the most part, they have no prejudices. Those seem to really develop later.

Schools are a wonderful place to work. It's mostly a happy place except on test day. The point is we need to keep schools a happy place where students' minds are developing and eventually released on the world. A well-educated and well-rounded student is the goal. This election is simple. If you want to turn the ship around, vote for our opponents. If you want to stay on top and continue moving in a positive direction, re-elect the present board. I'm asking for your vote on August 23rd. Vote Roy Terry. Experience matters.

[01:33:51]

John Davis: Thank you. And Ana Turino.

Ana Turino: Again, thank you, everyone for coming out tonight. Thank you for moderating. I appreciate it. As you noticed, all of us answered a few questions up here today. But there are so many more that need to be addressed that were not. One thing I do want to say is that, yes, we do have a lot of Hispanics and a lot of non-English speaking students.

But if we would revisit all the policies, we could possibly have these children make gains and be promoted as opposed to waiting in a classroom to see if somebody will help them that they're not being placed to cover a classroom or something else. I have been in education-- I don't know if I said this before-- for 15 years. I have seen the spiraling down of education since back then, and it has not been addressed. There have been a lot of issues that have been mentioned in this forum. And as you've noticed, they've been around for years, and they have not been addressed. It's time for a change. Vote for me and, Ana Turino, for district five. Thank you.

[01:34:58]

John Davis: Thank you. And Timothy Moshier.

Timothy Moshier: I never in a million years thought I'd be sitting here running for public office, let alone school board. I spent 30 years in the trucking business delivering everything. Now it's my turn to deliver a quality education to your children. I have [audio cuts out 01:35:14] now. It's not common sense. I mean, it's a \$1.3 billion budget. They're talking about getting teachers more pay. Well, why hasn't it been done? It's just the education system is not working in Collier County, with almost 40% of the students under where their grade level should be. It shouldn't be like that.

They're talking about promising more, promising more. They've had the last four years to do that. They haven't delivered. I just have common sense, and I just want to deliver it for you. If they were doing their job, I wouldn't be sitting here right now. Just vote for me on August 23rd. There's lots of things we can do. In the trucking business, I've dealt with everything that has come up. And that's what we're going to have to do with the education system. As everything comes up, analyze the problem, take care of it, and fix it. Thank you.

[01:36:06]

John Davis: Thank you, sir. And fellow district five candidate to my right, Jackie Keay.

Jackie Keay: Students first. As we see with national testing, students in 12th grade are actually less proficient than students in fourth and eighth grade. So, instead of teaching and educating and inspiring our children, we are dumbing them down. So, my goal is to unite the community so we can have a common goal of educating children, making sure that they have the skills to get a job, support themselves, becoming contributing members of our society, but ultimately to be able to progress forward, to defend our democracy, and defend our country when we're gone. If we don't train them, give them the skills that they need, they're going to be helpless, and this country will no longer be a great freedom-loving, brave community and country. So, we need to do better by our students. Thank you.

[01:37:04]

John Davis: Thank you. And our last district five candidate Dr. Arthur Boyer.

Dr. Arthur Boyer: I'm celebrating my 30 years in the U.S. and 30 years in Collier County. I started as a farm worker, and here I am today. I'm running, and I stand for transformational, learner-driven education, and special commitment to special education, parental rights, engagement, and involvement. And I do believe in community advocacy and our teachers. It's time to make a satisfying change for our teachers, our everyday heroes. And it's time for us to start producing more high school diplomas than mug shots, like we've been doing.

In Collier County, we have over 2,000 kids actually attending disciplinary schools. There is no expectation for them to get a high school diploma. We can have more doctors in Collier County, we can have more lawyers, we can have more nurses, we can have more people like us running to serve, defend, and protect the best interests of Collier County and our students. I'm Dr. Boyer. I'm running for district five. I would appreciate your vote. Thank you.

[01:38:18]

John Davis: All right, thank you. And now moving on to our district one Collier School Board candidates final closing statements beginning with Dr. Jory Westberry.

Jory Westberry: I have a genuine love of education and how it expands knowledge. I have been an elementary middle school teacher, Golden Apple teacher, assistant principal and principal for 14 years - as principal. I've done curriculum-writing budgets, evaluations, participating in and leading various organizations with and outside the school.

I am an addict to professional development. I try to take advantage of any professional relevant knowledge that I can grasp. One of the things that I would continue to do is advocate for our students. I am student oriented and have been since I was born. Vote for me on August 23rd. Thank you.

[01:39:24]

John Davis: Thank you. And Jerry Rutherford.

Jerry Rutherford: One of our former presidents stated, "A nation that doesn't know what it was yesterday, doesn't know what it is today nor what it's trying to do." So, we're trying to do a futile thing if we don't know where we came from or what we've been about. Thomas Jefferson said, "A nation that expects to be ignorant and free in a civilization expects what never was and never will be." The founders had a form of education that gave them a 95% literacy rate while the rest of the world is at 43%. They had the four Rs - research, reason, relate, and record. The founders placed a high priority on education. The Northwest Ordinance stated, "Religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and means of education shall forever be encouraged." So, they wanted to schools, they want to acknowledge, but they wanted religion and morality which we have lost.

[01:40:25]

John Davis: Thank you. And our final candidate also running for district one Collier County School Board, Kimberly M. Boobyer.

Kimberly Ann Boobyer: Thank you. I am the best candidate in district one to bring change. I understand the complexity of this position and how to work with others to affect change. I have the diplomacy, confidence, and competence necessary. There is a great need for new governance, oversight, and leadership. The current board has refused to acknowledge the more than one-third of students that are failing ELA and math.

The history of the current board has been to consistently vote five zero on the consent agenda, approving millions of dollars with no discussion each month. They have focused only on their accolades and ignored their failures. I will acknowledge the district's failures. I will offer solutions that address improving academic excellence for all students. I will focus the direction of the district toward getting back to the basics of teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic. Vote for me, Kimberly Boobyer, Mama Bear, and your best choice in district one. Thank you.

[01:41:33]

John Davis: Well, thank you very much. This concludes the formal portion of tonight's candidate forum. On behalf of myself and everybody at WGPU Public Media, I want to thank everybody who came out to

join us in the audience, everybody who's tuning in on the radio, watching us on Facebook Live, or wherever you are online. And of course, a thank you to all the 11 candidates we have here on stage tonight. There might be a lot of different ideas about what the best way is to go forward. But they obviously all share a passion and concern for the future education and wellbeing of the children and students of Collier County. Thank you so much.

[session ends 01:42:11]

Professional transcript by Patricia Wilson via [Upwork](#).