

# School Board Candidate Forum

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## **SPEAKERS**

Danielle Hudson, NABOR; Michael Wynn, Moderator; Kelly Mason; Jeff Donaldson; Tim Moshier; Ford Dalusma.

### **Danielle Hudson, NABOR 00:00**

We're so happy to have you here this evening for our school board forum. Before I start thanking our co-sponsors and introducing our timekeepers and moderator, can I ask that everyone please stand and join me to the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of our country. 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. First, I would like to thank our co-sponsors for this evening's event. NABOR is proud to be a part of the Collier County Forum Coalition, and our co-sponsors for this event are the League of Women Voters of Collier County, Naples Better Government, the Greater Naples Chamber, and CBIA. If you could just give them a little bit of a round of applause for our flyers at the back table that talk about Politics in the Park, that is another event that the Forum Coalition puts together. I expect to see everybody there, and that is next week on 17. I'd like to introduce our timekeepers. In the front, we have Miss Kim Ellis and Mr. Ted DeGroot. You'll be seeing some colors flying as we go. We have a green for go, a yellow for 30-second warning, and then red for stop. And it's at this time that I'm going to introduce our moderator so excited to have Michael Wynn as our moderator this evening, and he has served as board chairman and president of Sunshine Ace Hardware in Naples, Florida, since 2005 Sunshine Ace Hardware first opened in 1958 and is one of the largest family-owned home improvement and outdoor recreation retailers in Florida. Currently, there are 15 locations delivering friendly, helpful service and quality brands to Pinellas, Manatee, Charlotte, Lee, and Collier County, as well as Sunshine Ace Handyman Services serving Collier and Lee counties. He has held various positions with increasing responsibility with Sunshine Ace Hardware since 1992 Mr. Winn is the past chair of the board of directors of the Miami branch of the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta. He is also a member of the board of directors for the Florida Chamber Leadership Florida Chair and the NCH Health Care System second vice chair. Where does he find the time? I do not know. He is a member of YPO, the Florida Council of 100 and is the immediate past chair of the Florida Gulf Coast University Board of Trustees. He was awarded Hardware Industries Top Gun Award, presented by the National Retail Hardware Association in 2014, finalist for the Ernst and Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award in 2014 Junior Achievements Business Hall of Fame Laureate in 2014 2017 FGCU Alumni of the Year voted the 2017 Gulf Shore Business Best Boss for a large company, and business observer 2019 icons of business, the 2019 Naples Daily News Outstanding Citizen of the Year, and was awarded the 2023 Gulf Shore Life Men of the Year. Sunshine Ace Hardware has been recognized by Gulfshore

Business Magazine as the best place to work for the last five years. Michael resides in Naples with his wife, Kristen. Please join me in giving Michael a huge round of applause.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator 03:54**

Thank you so much, Danielle. Thank you to all of you that made time to be here tonight. So, we'll welcome all of you to the Collier County School Board candidate forum. The purpose of this event is to provide voters with an opportunity to hear directly from the candidates seeking office and to learn about their views and issues affecting our schools and community. So each candidate will receive equal speaking time. Candidates are asked to respect the time limits and our time keepers to avoid interruptions and focus their remarks on the issues and qualifications for office. We also ask that the audience remain respectful throughout the forum, please refrain from applause, cheering, booing, or other reactions, so that all candidates have an equal opportunity to be heard. So, my role today is to ensure a fair and orderly discussion, and my ruling will be final on all procedural decisions on time and format, so tonight I'd like to welcome four of our school board candidates to our forum discussion, Mr. Donaldson running for district one, Mr. Moshier running for district five, Mrs. Mason running for district three, and Mr. Dalusma running for district five, and as a reminder, members of the Collier County Public School System are elected in at-large countywide elections. So, while each school board member seat is associated with the geographic district, voters in Collier County vote for every school board seat that appears on the ballot, regardless of where they live in the county. So, a couple rules to go over for the audience. I mentioned one of them: no cheering, clapping, booing, or verbal reactions during candidate responses, but also please silence your cell phones, and if possible, even to vibrate can sometimes be distracting. So, please power those off to be even better. Please do not interrupt the candidates or myself. Also, please be respectful, and any questions that you submit, please make sure that they are related to school board issues. We have no cards in front of you. We have a lot to get through, but we are going to try to get a few questions in from the audience, so please have questions you'd like to submit, but I'll just note cardinal cells will be around to pick those up, and please understand too that if we have anyone that might be disruptive in the audience, which I'm confident will not be the case, we may need, we do reserve the right to ask you to, so again, thank you again for joining us. And Mrs. Mason, you drew the lucky straw back there in the kitchen. You get to go first to prove your opening statement.

**Kelly Mason 06:30**

All right. Good evening, everybody. Thank you so much for attending this event tonight. Oftentimes people overlook school board, but it might be one of the most important positions. A little bit about me, for those of you who don't know, I am a mom, proud mom of two teenagers. I was a school teacher. I taught high school when I first moved down here, actually 20 years ago this summer. I was at Palmetto Ridge. After having my children, I decided to embark on a crazy journey to establish and found Mason Classical Academy, where I served as the board president for 13 years, all in a volunteer capacity. I did serve on the school board from 2014 to 2018 which, for those of you who've been around, I know it was a very different experience than probably what you have seen now from 22 to present, which I'm really proud of my service these four years. One of the things, when I got elected, I had a plan of ways to improve our school district as a whole. The biggest thing was reestablishing the board's constitutional role in governing the school district. I think there was some confusion as to who actually is running the school board, and now I feel like it's very obvious that the superintendent runs the operations the day to

day of the school, and then the board has our separate role of governance and policy. So that was one of the big priorities I spearheaded redoing the mission and vision statement of the district establish board priorities right out the gate. There's a lot I feel like we've accomplished in these first few years. I would like an opportunity to give four more years to this school district. I'm sure there'll be an opportunity for me to talk more. Other little personal thing about me, I also coach group fitness. I'm very competitive. I compete in 5k locally, and I have six rescue animals. Big fan of rescue. So, anyway, thank you again for being here. My time is

**Michael Wynn, Moderator** 08:34

up. Thank you so much. And, Mr. Donaldson.

**Jeff Donaldson** 08:38

thank you. Well, as Miss Mason said, thank you all for coming out tonight. You know, we do these forums pretty regularly, and sometimes we're in a room with four people, and that's all they care. But I love that you care about what's going on with the school board. My name is Jeff Donaldson. I have been married to my wife, Bethany, for 31 years. We have five kids. Our oldest three are married, our youngest just graduated from high school, and I'm looking forward to empty nest a little more than my wife is. She's realizing she's stuck with me now, but I serve as a pastor here in Naples Church, called Christ Community Naples, and we love our community. I'm here to serve. That's the calling on my life. It is to serve, is to serve people, to serve, and I want to serve in our school board. School board, we help a lot through our church. We help a lot with our local schools. We, our church is located about a mile from Manatee Elementary School and Manatee Middle School, and we have they are a strategic partner for us with backpack drives and school supplies and teacher lunches and all kinds of things. So I love doing that. My mom was a public school English teacher, and she would not always be pleased with my use of the English language, but I do try to get it best I can, and our oldest daughter is a school teacher. She wanted to teach in a public school as well. My wife and I, when our kids were young, helped get a private school started. That's grown quite large now, and I served on the board there, and I'm excited to serve our students in Collier County. Thank you for being here. Thank you for hearing us out.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator** 10:24

Thank you so much.

**Tim Moshier** 10:27

Good evening. Thank you all for coming. My name is Tim Moshier. Over four years ago, I didn't think I'd be sitting up here. I didn't think I'd be running for political office. I spent a little over 30 years in transportation. I worked for Ryder Driver Services, so I kind of, you know, been with people and around people. I went into semi retirement in January of 21 decided to work with my wife. I've been married to my wife, Debby, for 38 it'll be 39 years this summer. I have two daughters, a stepdaughter, three grand kids that all live on the East Coast, so my biggest thing I got into the school board because it was during the height of COVID, I didn't like the mask idea, so I went, started seeing, I didn't like what the school board was actually doing, they would have the mask on if someone said anything, they get up and they walk out, it was just a disaster, so I went to my other school board meeting, and then July of 21 I decided, hey, you know, step up or shut up. So I ran, and it was, it was a good run. I kind of.. I'm

not the type of person who gets in front of people and starts talking, so it takes a lot for me. I've been doing this for four years. I just.. I just enjoy it. I mean, I get up there, I see what the kids do. I spend a lot of time out in Immokalee, helping them out, making sure they go up. I've done truancy court. Come on, leaving at 5o'clock in the morning for the Greater Florida Consortium, or excuse me, that's one of it. And then School Board Association up in Tampa, it's a three-day conference, so I'll be up there for three days, just finding out the laws and making sure everything you say and do. When I was running, you think you can do a lot of things that you can't do, and you know we do the best that we can. We have to interpret everything that they say up in Tallahassee, and just make sure we have the policies and just follow the laws. So, basically, you know, I'm just here doing it. I've enjoyed doing what I'm doing. I enjoy working with the kids, I enjoy getting out there in the community, and just making sure we have everything that we need, looking at the finances. One of the big things that my colleague and I did is, you know, teachers pay, so we've been pushing that. So, I hope I'm done. So,

**Michael Wynn, Moderator** 12:30

thank you so much. And Mr. Dalusma.

**Ford Dalusma** 12:34

Thank you. Hello, everybody. Thank you for being here. My name is Ford Dalusma. I'm a former Collier County Public School student, I walk these hallways, sandy classrooms, high five many of our teachers, and I think the school board deserves someone that experienced it firsthand what it's like to be in our Collier County Public Schools. I come from a family that has teachers, my brother was a teacher in Immokalee and I've seen him struggle as many of our teachers do on the day on a daily basis. I am just here so to be here in behalf of present our teachers, because I also want them to increase their compensation and pay, because they are a vital backbone of our community, of our schools, and many of them are with our students and kids more than we are. Sometimes they are vital, and we need to work on maintaining the best of them. A little bit about me, I am at my church, I teach the band during election season, I volunteer my own free time to just inform those people out in Immokalee who I can. I work as a translator, and I'm just glad to be here and try to outreach and do what I can to help support the Collier County community.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator** 13:55

Thank you so much. So, our first question is going to go to Mr. Moshier. The question is, what experience, perspective, expertise, or skill do you bring to the school board that you believe differentiates you from the other board members, and how does that difference affect board decisions or priorities?

**Tim Moshier** 14:16

Being a parent, having kids that gone through the school system, I just want to make sure that everything got taken care of that we needed, so I basically got on the school board. One of my top priorities was teachers' pay, so we did very aggressive pay raises. We had a superintendent retiring, so we had to do this search for the new superintendent. She's been doing very well. We just renewed her contract last week, and just caring about the kids, getting out there, you know. Twenty percent of what we do is budget, and every budget and policy, and the rest is just community relations school system is

doing. We're in the top handful of schools in the state, so I think we're doing very well on top page with the teachers, so we had a lot of stuff accomplishments to want to keep everything going.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator** 15:06

Thank you. Mr. Donaldson.

**Jeff Donaldson** 15:11

Yeah, uh, as Mr. Moshier said, if I have kids going to school, and we take our education seriously, so we've decided different things on different years, sometimes in home school, sometimes in private school, sometimes in public school, and we care a lot about what school our kids go to. We spend a lot of time at the schools. One of our daughters graduated from Lely High School, another two from Marco Island Academy. So I care a lot about that. As I said earlier, I was spent a long time on board of a private, a large private school, K through 12, so learning to understand policies, how they work, procedures. And then I spent probably 20 years of my life as an executive pastor at a church of about 14,000 people, managing seven locations. So learning how to manage people, how to manage large budgets, how to work with people, how to look at data and facts, and learn how to make the best decision I've been in leadership for a long time, and I'm looking forward to lending the skills that I've been entrusted to me to help make Collier County Schools an even better place to be.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator** 16:10

Thank you. Mr. Dalusma.

**Ford Dalusma** 16:13

Yes, I kind of mentioned this before, that I went to, I've been in the public school, so that experience and firsthand perspective is very beneficial in understanding how we can change and better our public schools. Our public schools right now have received an A grade, and we want to continue that. Many of our schools, many of our students have graduated with diplomas and certificates in a lot certificate programs and vocational school programs, we would love to increase that. I don't know, a 25% increase in our graduates having diplomas and certificates, so that they're already ready for the world once they graduate and walk across the next stage to be, and to have these things accomplished, we must invest in our educators, invest in our staff and care about their well-being, and make sure they can afford to stay in our communities, because many of them can have ... ok,

**Michael Wynn, Moderator** 17:12

Thank you. Mrs. Mason.

**Kelly Mason** 17:12

right. As I mentioned, I was a teacher before. I've been actually involved in education for over two decades at this point. I think with my experience with starting and founding a school from the ground up, it essentially was a crash course in education policy, laws, facilities, marketing. I also had to learn a lot about finances, budgeting, but I think what you'll be hard pressed to find is someone in my position serving in a, in the charter school world, I know sometimes there's issues regarding school choice, and I'm sure we'll touch on that today, but I need to be hard pressed to find somebody who has spent the

amount of time and effort and energy doing this for zero compensation. I've done it for my kids, it's been a benefit to hundreds of other students, and I'm very passionate about it. Thank you.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator** 18:04

Thank you. Our next question will start with Mr. Dalusma and the question is, Collier County Public Schools has a history of strong academic performance. What specific strategies would you support to improve student achievement for all students while also closing achievement gaps among student groups?

**Ford Dalusma** 18:21

Yes, I kind of referenced this before, increasing our graduates' certificates in dual enrollment in the CNA program. A lot of them know about Lorenzo Walker, but not have all of them go to the application school. These programs are very beneficial. A lot of the economy of Florida in our community are directly correlated with programs these schools provide, so that is very important and critical in making sure that we can continue to improve our schools and our graduates and the students in our schools. Thank you.

**Kelly Mason** 19:05

One of the things I'm proud of that I spearheaded was bringing back explicit phonics to our school district. It's critical for our students in order to be literate. Explicit phonics is a proven phonics program is also a great remediation tool, so in terms of closing the gaps, this this tool that we have right now, and it's we're already proving success with the increase in reading rates, but it's a phenomenal remediation tool for even kids who are struggling readers, dyslexia definitely going to close those reading gaps. We also, as Mr. Dalusma was talking about, in reference to certificates, we've done a lot with Lorenzo Walker, the superintendent, really spearheaded changing what the model was supposed to be, that way students who aren't going to maybe colleges or universities have pathways for success in careers right out of graduation, and that is tremendous for our students.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator** 20:07

Thank you.

**Tim Moshier** 20:11

I think the dual enrollment has been a very big thing we've been talking about. We, Lorenzo Walker, we now have, I think it's well over 600 kids dual enrollment in there, and this year I think there's no number the exact number, but it's up a lot. Also, when I did the graduation at Immokalee High School, a week later I did the high tech graduation out there, and I'd say at least 20 to 25 of the students that graduated the week before were getting dual enrollments, so they went the following week, and they got that. It's kind of nice seeing one kid one week getting their high school diploma, and then they're getting a certificate the next week for welding, mechanics, child care, or whatever. So, it's, you know, it's very good that we're doing that, and we're just, we're just about open. I just think the school system's doing much better than you know it was before, and I just think the phonics that we have Miss Mason put in is very good, and we just, you know, everything's going much better.

**Jeff Donaldson** 21:09

Yeah, I love the question, how we continue to have strong academics. I think have strategies to close the gap. I think one of the areas that we really need to target, continue to target, is elementary schools, kindergarten, first, second, third. These kids, we really need to teach them the basics of reading, so they have it. A lot of our elementary students are ESL students. I think it's even more important. We have to have more urgency to be able to help those kids to be able to read. We all know that if we can read, we can be productive citizens, and so having an opportunity, I think the school board has done a good job of continuing to put some metrics upon administration and teachers to ensure even when we get the bonus time, you know, did we hit what we were trying to accomplish. I love Lorenzo Walker, I love I-Tech, and there's lots of kids who can, that those trade schools basically are so valuable for you to get an education, to be able to go out and work right after, you know, one of my kids wasn't a college student, he wanted to go right into the workforce, and he didn't have an opportunity like these students had, it would have been amazing for him. So that's great. Those are great programs.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator** 22:14

Great, thank you so much. And Mr. Donaldson, this next question is going to start with you. Teacher shortages continue to affect districts across Florida, what strategies would you advocate to recruit, retain, and support high-quality teachers with Collier County Schools?

**Jeff Donaldson** 22:30

It's a great question. I was last night in Ave Maria, and I got to hear Dr. Ricciardelli talk about this a little bit. Our school superintendent is doing a great job with the Collier schools, and some of the even issues with Lee County has forced, they're getting a lot of applications here, I think she said, and one of the current school board members, you correct me on the number, there's maybe 93 openings with more of the 500 applications for 93 openings, that's really strong, that gives you an opportunity to continue to choose the best teachers, I agree with Mr. Dalusma. I have to continue to figure out how do we pay our teachers the best we can. The school board's done a great job in the last three or four years to really increase teacher pay, but that's got to continue to be a focus of the school board. How do we manage the budget so we can continue to properly pay teachers? And then I think the last thing is we want to look at teachers and sure are they fully certified to be able to teach in these classes. I meet with a lot of teachers, and one of the things they're frustrated about is there's in some classrooms teachers who don't have the qualifications, and I think we need to look specifically at those and replace them.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator** 23:36

Thank you so much, Mr. Moshier.

**Tim Moshier** 23:38

Can you repeat the question again.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator** 23:40

Sure, teacher shortages continue to affect districts across Florida. What strategies would you advocate to recruit, retain, or support, high-quality teachers?

**Tim Moshier** 23:48

Well, we have top paid, we're in the top two or three in the state, so I think that helps out tremendously. We have about 91 available openings, I think there are over 790 applications for that, so we have people coming over from Broward that actually coming over here to drive the county, Lee County, and around there. So I think we've accomplished that. I just think we're doing a great job. The superintendent knows what she's doing, and I think that's a part to it. We've done our best. We're debt free. We're growing like crazy with you, drive around Collier County, all the new growth, all the developments, all the roads coming in, we're just opening up since I've been on the board, we opened up a high school, and now we've done an elementary, and we're doing the second elementary out in Ave Maria, so you know, doing a great job studying out teachers and getting what my other areas are. Thank you so much.

**Kelly Mason 24:44**

All right, so teacher retention recruitment was one of our five board priorities with human resources. So that was definitely a priority that we hit the ground running with. We did a baseline survey with all of our staff to see what's the morale, the basic morale across the board. We've since done other climate surveys with our staff, and has have seen the growth in morale, so that has improved drastically. As mentioned, teacher pay increases - we were very aggressive in the first year on the board, 9% second year 12% third year 11% plus \$1,000 bonus. Obviously, this year you probably heard we couldn't be as aggressive, but we are not facing what other counties are right now, which is major drop job losses, and so our retention recruitment data is posted monthly, so you can actually see we're very transparent about it, and it's very positive. Thank you.

**Ford Dalusma 25:37**

Yes, we are Collier County is one of the top school districts in terms of pay for our teachers in the state, but the state is nearly last, I believe we 50th in the country. So it's like being the fastest course on the highway. I mean it's good in a sense, but can we, we can pat ourselves on the back in a sense, but we still need to work on the pay for our teachers, so that they don't go out of state. That's why I support a referendum brought forth by our citizens to increase teacher pay drastically, dramatically, and as well as staff in the schools, because again, as we know, the teachers and the staff are the backbone of our school systems, and we are very proud of our school system, and we do not want to diminish that anyway. Thank you.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator 26:27**

So, Mrs. Mason, this question is to be directed to you first. Beyond physical security measures, what additional steps should the school board take to ensure students and staff feel safe and supported on campus?

**Kelly Mason 26:40**

Well, we've seen a lot of laws since Parkland coming down from this state, and we also have a tremendous relationship with CCSO. We have done a lot to follow. We have new door locks on all the doors, we have locations in all the rooms to protect students in case of emergencies. We go through these lockdown drills. I know it's a sensitive topic, but I do think the biggest thing that we have here, that not every county has in Florida, is having deputies, armed deputies in every school, that not only are they there just to, you know, protect the students, one of the biggest things they do is also build

relationships with students, so in terms of safety and security, they learn a lot. Kids share a lot of information. We've been able to prevent things that have been heard, you know, threats against the schools, and I think that has been tremendous and protecting our students.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator** 27:37

Thank you very much. Mr. Dalusma.

**Ford Dalusma** 27:40

Could you repeat the question?

**Michael Wynn, Moderator** 27:41

Sure, beyond physical security measures, what additional steps should the school board take to ensure students and staff feel safe and supportive?

**Ford Dalusma** 27:50

Yes, safety starts with trust, and for our students to be comfortable with staff and members of the school, so that when there is issues or problems, they can report that either anonymously or include the counselors doing this would ensure a safer environment for all of our students, and to ensure that issue situations don't happen in our community, and we would hate to see something along those lines happen, and I am very proud that we do have all deputies in our schools armed and ready and well trained.

**Tim Moshier** 28:33

I just love the relationship Collier County Public Schools has with the sheriff's department since we've been on the board, and Tallahassee dictated all, although every classroom gets locked, single entrance points. Anytime that comes into the school, you have to show your ID, so we know who they are. We have cameras throughout, so about 80% of everything in the every single solitary school has cameras. Okay, someone happens to walk by, you can identify what's going on, the relationship with all the sheriffs are working, all there are excellent with all the kids, they get along great with them. Every sheriff in the, in the Collier County sheriff has a badge to get in, in case something were to happen, they can get in there and get it taken care of. So you have one minimum, one deputy in every school, and you can probably have at least another five to 10 deputies in there, if something were to happen within less than five minutes, which is great.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator** 29:26

Thank you so much, Mr. Donaldson.

**Jeff Donaldson** 29:29

Yeah, being new to learning all about the schools, I'm quite impressed with the security procedures that the school has. When you see the school resource officers at every single location we've gotten to know our school resource officers at our school, you know, by first name basis. He's, you know, my kids love them, and so that's a really big deal to know that every door locks automatically. They do checks, they check three schools every single week to make sure that no doors could, you could open if you do, Dr. Ricciardelli is in trouble. Anywhere from every classroom has a corner where the kids go

to where you couldn't see them from the door, like it's really buttoned down. And I'm impressed with it, and I think they're doing a great job.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator** 30:16

Thank you so much. The next question will go first to Mr. Moshier. What would be your top budget priority, and what existing expenditure would you be willing to reconsider or reduce to funding?

**Tim Moshier** 30:31

Right now, all our funding comes from Tallahassee. We, they adjust our millage rate, and we just kind of have to go with what they have to do. Right now, we're just less money this year than we did last year. We just got the budget, so I haven't been able to sit down with our finance guy, but we're basically, since we've been on the school board, we've eliminated over 300 positions that didn't touch the children. We're cutting back on everything we could possibly cut back on, and we're just doing a great job. The superintendent looks at everything and just sees what we can do. Another priority of the superintendent is the books. Every night, every Tallahassee says we have to keep doing the books, the manufacturers and the book publishers cut back, so we're trying to extend that out, so we don't have to keep spending millions and millions of dollars every year on the same stuff. English doesn't change, math doesn't change, so we've been working on having the superintendent. Thank you,

**Michael Wynn, Moderator** 31:23

Mr. Donaldson.

**Jeff Donaldson** 31:26

Yeah, I think obviously I'm a person like you all who cares about education. I think the front line of education is the classroom. The teachers we have in the classroom have to be taken care of first. I love our administration. I love the people who support the classrooms, but those teachers have to feel most cared for, and while the school board's done a great job, we have to consider looking at how we can fund those teachers to remain in those classrooms, and we don't lose them. The other thing I was just spent a long time yesterday with some people headquarters looking at the budget, I think long term there's going to be some potential shortfalls, even within the operations budget, in terms of capital expenses. The school, listen, the last three schools, Mr. Moshier mentioned them, the high school and the two elementary schools were paid for with cash, and so we got to think about, do we have funds to continue to manage the growth coming to Collier County

**Speaker 2** 32:32

[Discussion about battery on microphone needing changing]

**Ford Dalusma** 32:36

Yes, so budget priority. I think we should make sure we have a transparency in our budget, luckily our school board very much, our school board paid off a substantial amount of debt our school system had, and I applaud that. The only issue is that we weren't sure where that money came from and how much we had remaining, so but I would love for that meeting, so that we can make sure we allocate the proper expenditures to back into our students to make sure that we focus on student outcomes, teacher

compensation, and make sure that all the staff in our system and our school system is supported, so that they can remain in our school system.

**Kelly Mason** 33:19

All right, so one of our top our top five board priorities was fiscal responsibility, so right out the gate, the superintendent and her team created a spending reductions group so that we could look at wasteful spending. So I do want to point that out. As far as transparency, I will say we have been extremely transparent and have been very open about the fact we are spending reserves we're not in a deficit, but we are having to dip into those reserves, and as it was mentioned previously, the state funding has been very low compared to it's not even keeping up close with inflation, so those are definite concerns, so as far as budget priority, I would say, really looking at return on investment for any of the programs we are using to ensure that these are effective instead of spending money. We did get rid of some of those programs when I first came on the board that were a waste. I would say another place we can reduce is probably some of the technology, we can slow down some of some of that, but definitely just want to be transparent. We are spending some reserves, and that comes down to the state. So, talk to Tallahassee.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator** 34:26

Thank you so much. And I just want to remind everyone, if you have a question, you filled out your notecard If you could please hold your card up, and we'll have someone around to pick up those questions, and again we'll try to find some time to answer a few of those.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator** 34:41

So, the next question we're going to go to Mr. Dalusma for the first response. What role should parents play in curriculum decisions and school governance, and how would you improve communication between families and the district?

**Ford Dalusma** 34:54

Yes, that's a great question. So parents will parent, and I believe teachers should teach. The parents should have a voice and express their concerns to school boards and the teachers whenever they arise, but we do. I do trust in our professionals and our educators at the, you know, firsthand basis with our students, where they can make sure they're informing the students and teaching the students properly, and following the state and local laws, make sure that they fully educate them on the curriculum that is provided, but again, we do want our teachers to teach all the curriculum, and we want our parents to make their voices heard whenever they feel to do so.

**Kelly Mason** 35:50

All right, one thing I always talk about are that parents are partners with us in education with everything that we do, they are allowed to be involved in terms of staff committees at every school, and they can be involved there. We encourage parental involvement through PTO committees, and I think we have a tremendous amount of parents who are very much involved in terms of curriculum. We do have our team, you know, and the board working to choose curriculum, but I will say we are following the best standards. That is one way that has prevented a lot of their, the crisis of things coming in outside of the schools of indoctrination. That's not, that's just simply not happening. And so, but again, parents are

very much involved in, in this partnership that we have, and I feel like we've really brought them into the fold, especially when you've got people on the school board who actually have kids in the schools.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator** 36:46

Thank you. Mr. Moshier.

**Tim Moshier** 36:49

Just about every school board meeting, I tell parents, get involved, their kids grow up fast. I mean, I'm a grandfather already, so time flies, get out there, go with their school, go there to events, you know, hit sporting events, just try to get out there and do as much as you can. And every one of our teachers is willing to talk to any, any parent about any issues or problems they have. So, if they have any concerns, bring it up to them and talk to them, you know. It's two parts. I mean, you only have your kids about 1400 hours a year. There's over 8700 hours in a year. So, please get involved with them, help them out, get them reading. 50% of our kids coming into the schools don't even know how to read, so we have to play catch up. So, it's a parenting and it's a partnership with the parents, because we want the kids to do as best as they can. You know, we just, we work with them, and we're willing to do anything we can to help them out.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator** 37:38

Thank you, Mr. Donaldson.

**Jeff Donaldson** 37:41

This is a great question, because I believe as a parent it's my responsibility to choose where my child is going to have the best opportunity for an education, train up a child in the way they should go. That's my job, and so I love this idea of partnering with schools, trust, but verify, and I want to be a part of my kids' life. I want to know what's happening at the school. Parents should be able to look at the curriculum, flag something that they feel they don't like. Go have a meeting with your teacher. Certainly, we don't want a school system that says, of course, parents, of course, parents, please don't ever show up. We want parent involvement. I think the parents in the school make it better. When I was a kid growing up, and we had class parties, and the moms would show up, and the dads would show up, it was better. And I think we should be involved. My wife and I have been team parents for the football team for a long time. I was assistant cross country coach for my daughter's team a long time, we're very involved in our schools, because I want to know what's going on, and I've always felt welcome, and that should continue to happen. Thank you. And we're going to go to one of our audience questions, and Mr. Donaldson, this will be to you first. Says, do you think it is important to visit schools as a board member, and view the interaction with teachers with students and teachers with administration. Absolutely, you know, it's an interesting thing here. You know, I would say I'm running for district one, so you know, just think Lely and Manatee and Tommy Barfield, but you're actually responsible for all the schools, and so I've already stated within my first year it would be my goal to visit every school to have an appointment to see every single school, all the public schools and the charter schools to make a visit. Honestly, I'm the kind of guy who wants to have planned visits, and then later on some surprise visits, because I don't want to always just see the best possible formal appointments you can put on, because the school board member is there, but look, I do trust what's happening in the classrooms, but we have to be on site, we have to see the facilities, the state of the facilities, what the

kids are learning. I want to sit in on lessons and hear what the teachers are talking about. I think it's very important.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator** 39:55

Thank you. And Mr. Moshier.

**Tim Moshier** 39:59

Every year, I hit at least every school, at least in my district, at least once. I try to hit other schools also, but it's just getting out there. I'm not a gotcha person. If there's a problem, I want them to talk to the teachers, talk to the principals, and find out what the issues are. And usually, there aren't any, so we do a good job taking care of that, and I just want to make sure that we're there to support them, give them everything they need, and I just think it's nice. They like to actually, when you show up at things, it's kind of nice. I mean, I've been showing up at football games out in Immokalee for the last four years. I know Miss Mason here has hit a lot of sporting events too with her kids, and it's just.. it's just amazing to get out there and see them and just be a part of it, show that you actually care. So, I think that's what they like most of all, just getting out there and, you know, making sure that they have everything they need, and show them, and ask questions, find out what their problems are, and what they need, and what they, you know, any concerns they have. And usually they're pretty straightforward with it, and it's kind of nice to work that out with them if there's any issues, but they're usually just not a whole lot. That's about it.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator** 40:57

Thank you. Mrs. Mason.

**Kelly Mason** 40:59

I did want to share this. So, my term this time has been so different in terms of visiting schools before. It seemed like they didn't want us there, and with the new superintendent and the rapport she's built, the morale is so high. I do have planned visits. I go to all the schools in my district, and then I usually pick others. They don't - it's no dog and pony show. It's about building rapport with the administration, visiting classrooms. And what has been so incredible is how much trust that has been built over these few years, and really how candid the conversations have been. I would have never got that in my last term. They would have just sugar coated everything, or just told you the bare minimum. They have been very honest about things, sometimes things that are concerning that we can address and work together. So I've been truly impressed with my school visits, and again, it hasn't been a dog and pony show. It's been, it feels real and genuine in those visits, and I think it's important. Thank you.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator** 42:00

Thank you.

**Ford Dalusma** 42:02

Yes, I do think that school board members should visit every school, at least in their district, but every school in the county as well. We should make that time and make that effort. I've been to a few of the schools, I haven't got the chance to speak with all the staff or teachers and whatnot, but I have spoken to the teachers union, and they tell me the concerns that, but I love to have scheduled visits where I

can meet with them, shake their hands, and see how the classes are being run, see how the students feel about their schools, and hear the concerns right from their lips, and but that is important, and I can't wait to do that. I went to the iTECH graduation too, and I saw, I saw how joyous that crowd was, and I am excited for when the school student starts next year to make sure I visit all the schools.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator** 42:51

Great, thank you so much.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator** 42:53

So, move on to another audience question, and this will first go to Mrs. Mason. Please comment on how you think the separation of church and state, as articulated in the US Constitution, should be observed in Collier schools.

**Kelly Mason** 43:06

That's a definitely a good question, and something that has come up. I mean, first and foremost, in fact, I was just having this conversation earlier with someone here in the audience that, you know, students are allowed to pray to their constitutional right in schools. I think there has been a push to push a, a religion within the school. One of my philosophies, and in my view, and at Mason Classical, it is a public school. There is no pushing any one religion. I do believe America is free, you know, about what religion you practice, but one of the things I said is you teach the virtues, you read the great books, you study history, you learn good versus evil, and these principles you don't have to force. I'm never going to, and I've said it from the dais, I'm not going to force religion. It is, as Mr. Donaldson said, it's a parent's role and responsibility, and I think there has to be a balance there, but you can.. oh, am I getting to stop? Okay, okay, all right. Thank you. I just saw the red.. sorry.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator** 44:09

Thank you. I hope my answer got distracted, and I wasn't doing my job. So, thank you. So Mr. Dalusma.

**Ford Dalusma** 44:15

Yes, there should be a full and complete separation of church and state in the classroom. There is, unfortunately, we do see that some curriculum, not some curriculum, but some programs and institutions are seeping into our public schools, and we see that in, like, PragerU and other institutes that are now, I don't know if a mandate, but they are used or allowed to be used in Florida public schools, which saddens me in a sense, because a lot of these programs, since their inception, was found that has an specific bias, so we make sure that stays away, and then we continue to verify and push the Constitution that says the separation must happen and be made where students can can and are free to practice any religion they want, and the schools do not support or condone one religion only in the sense of like teaching it for history. I think that's okay, teach it for history, because it's important to know the different backgrounds that happened in our society.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator** 45:20

Thank you so much. Mr. Moshier.

**Tim Moshier 45:23**

I like religion. I think it's, you know, look at your money, it's a God we trust. So, I think we should have that. I don't think that the government has the right as well as right to dictate you, but I think it should be available to be out and see what's around, so I think you should be able to experience all the religions, know what the religions are, because if you don't know, know what different religions are, how are you going to learn? And since we're moving education, I believe they should be there, but I don't think it's the government's job, the school's job to dictate it, as long as it's made available, so they can do it, and they can learn. I think that's fine. Our admin building is called the Dr. Martin Luther King building, so you know he was a minister and civil rights, so I think it's, you know, we've done a whole lot there, so I just, I think we should have it, I think they should be available there, and just be able to do it, but we shouldn't be forcing it onto individuals, you know, you can lose it, you know, like history lessons, and just go from there.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator 46:18**

Thank you. Mr. Donaldson.

**Jeff Donaldson 46:20**

This one felt like it was for the pastor. I, the word separation of church and state, actually doesn't exist in the Constitution or the Declaration of Independence, but I understand the concept, and though I am not running to make Collier schools a Christian school, that's not why I'm running in any way, shape, or form, but I do think at Easter, you can say what the story of Easter is, at Christmas, you can say what the story of Christmas is, at Hanukkah, you can say what the story of Hanukkah is. And I don't think we should be afraid to tell kids what's going on. On the dais in front of the school board is the state model that says, 'God we trust, and I'm not trying to put the 10 commandments back on the wall, but I have said publicly in the campaign I'd like to bring a prayer back to the school board meeting to do with the federal government, we do it at the state, we do it at local school boards, one of the few places we don't do it, and I think just acknowledging that we need to use some wisdom from the God we trust in would be very helpful.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator 47:16**

Thank you so much. This next question will first go to Mr. Moshier. Student mental health concerns continue to rise. What should the district's role be in providing mental health support while maintaining its primary educational mission?

**Tim Moshier 47:31**

Last school board meeting, we ended up with people that did the mental health to make sure that they got everything that they need. We're trying to get them a little bit more pay, and that way we do training through the entire staff, so we can identify any problems with any staff members, children, or just any problems in general. So we basically go through the training to make sure that anyone that needs it, whether it's a student or a teacher, or even people around there to do it. Our sheriff's departments are all trained for that. Most of our teachers are all our teachers are trained for that, and we just, you know, we look out for the mental health of everyone. A lot of things happen just in life. You don't know if the parents are getting divorced, different things happen with other kids in school that might be bothering a

child, so we just do our best to do everything we can, and we have professionals that go around and help them if they need that.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator** 48:25

Thank you. Mr. Donaldson.

**Jeff Donaldson** 48:27

We definitely need mental health counselors in the schools. It's one of the big struggles in the world today is kids who struggle with mental health, and we need to get them help on the front lines. Look, I don't think the school can or should be all things to all people. We're becoming more and more the nutritionist and the health care and the medical care and all of it. Look, I know there's families who can't afford it. There are great government programs outside of the school that can help parents with these things, but I want to see our well-trained mental health counselors at the schools meeting with the kids who really need it, of course, in conjunction with parents, but I believe that is a front-line issue. I'm glad the school district has it, and I am a big supporter.

**Ford Dalusma** 49:14

Thank you. Mr. Dalusma.

**Ford Dalusma** 49:14

Yes, mental health is very important and critical, and we may need to make sure that our students feel safe, and they're not suffering through bullying or any other way they may be unsafe. This means that we should increase training for all staff, all counselors. This also means increasing and having other aspects of ways for them to express when they do feel unsafe and do feel pressure, and it can express what their mental health status is, but that is a monthly review where everyone in the school writes down something, because we know that there can be some stigma when a student leaves to go to the counselor, so we don't want bullying of that nature causing any mental health strain on any of our students, because we know when students feel safe, unsafe, feel pressured, they perform worse in school, in class, and in school, and our main goal and main objective is to make sure student outcomes are as high as that they can be.

**Kelly Mason** 50:13

There are requirements from the state regarding mental health and what we need to provide for our students. One of the biggest things that I think is critical is making sure that our parents are involved in that, those communications. I think oftentimes there, there has, we have seen not so much here in Collier, but in other states, other districts where parents are not even informed of what's going on, and I have to say, as a parent with two kids, I would want to know what is going on, and I think it's wonderful that our schools have a lot of support and resources for our students, but I'm definitely big on making sure there is still, again, that partnership with the parents, and they are involved and aware of what's going on.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator** 50:58

Thank you. Just want to acknowledge, we've got a lot of great questions from the audience.

Unfortunately, we've only got time for one more question, plus closing statements. So, I'm going to go

out on the limb and assume that all of our candidates are going to be staying afterward. So, I would encourage you to have some of your great questions to them directly.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator 51:16**

So, for our final question, we're going to start with Mr. Dalusma. Looking ahead five years. What would success look like for Collier County Public Schools, and how would voters measure whether you helped achieve it?

**Ford Dalusma 51:28**

Success would look like higher teacher retention, continued success in our public school rates in our system lower student complaints of bullying and unsafety, and more of our graduates graduating with not only a diploma but certificates in our various vocational programs, or CNA, or dual enrollment. All of these aspects, this is what a successful tenure would look like in a few years.

**Kelly Mason 52:04**

All right, I think I told you earlier in my opening statement, I am very competitive, and I've always said from the dais I want Collier County to be the number one school district, not just in the state of Florida, but in the nation. We have already increased, just since I've been on the board. We went from seven to six, so we are heading into that direction. One of the things I would academic is one of our first number one board priorities. I would say I'd love to see increased improvement across the board in all benchmarks for students in achieving academic success, so that would be something I would want to see, and also continued prudence in our fiscal responsibility, and balancing that, balancing our budget. Again, I feel we've been extremely transparent, and I recommend visiting our website. There is plenty of information and videos and things that you can see, but I would definitely want to see our budget balanced and strong in five years as well. Thank you.

**Tim Moshier 53:06**

Since we've been on the board, our curve has gone up. We're doing better with our placement in this in the state with our schools, we're doing better financially, you know, we paid off some debts. We're trying to take care of all that. I mean, we're just heading in the right direction. I mean, we have a great superintendent. We're doing a lot of dual enrollment. We have kids graduating with other degrees that are getting out in the job market right now, which is great. The biggest thing right now is, I'd like to see, you know, Tallahassee is talking the talk, but they're not walking the walk. We need to get some more money from them, so we can have the money to pay our teachers, you know, more money. I mean, we're limited to what we have. I mean, I just can't make money appear. Two years ago, we did a referendum, so we moved some of the money from capital to the general fund, so we can pay the teachers. That's how we're doing it right now, and we just like to see more money coming in. Our capital budget was our capital millage was a two point mill, that was in 2008 They dropped it to 1.75 now 1.5 So, I'd like to see, you know, more money from Tallahassee, so we can do take care of our students. Thank you.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator 54:15**

Thank you so much. Mr. Donaldson.

**Jeff Donaldson 54:18**

Yeah, that's a great question. I'd like to see our B schools become A schools. I'd like to see our school district in five years being the top five school districts in the state of Florida. I think that's very attainable. I'd like to see more students graduating from Lorenzo Walker and I-Tech and advancing that thing. One of the things the school board's gonna have to think in five years, they just signed the superintendent to a five year contract, and in five years there's gonna be a decision on whether she wants to be around or take a break, and that could be a big, big thing, she's doing a great job, and so what does the future in the superintendent's office look like five years from now? So those are a few things I think we have to look at.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator 54:56**

Thank you so much. Now we're going to move to closing statements. And Mr. Dalusma, you chose, or drew, the lucky straw, to be able to go first on closing comments? So, we'll start with you.

**Ford Dalusma 55:05**

Thank you again. Thank you, everyone, for being here this evening. We knew we know you took the time out of your busy schedules to make it, and we appreciate that greatly. The main focus of our campaign, and to do everything we would like to get done, revolves around our teachers, revolves around our educators, and having this elite force that is directly with our students on a day to day basis, and to make sure we keep them and have them, and bring in more highly higher qualified and better qualified and just great people is to increase their compensation, their pay, because we have to respect them as professionals. They are our campaign strongly supports a referendum that our citizens are putting on the ballot to increase that compensation, and we'd like you guys to support as well and support the campaign, so that we can make sure that you continue this success of our Collier County Public Schools. Thank you.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator 56:02**

Thank you, Mr. Donaldson.

**Jeff Donaldson 56:06**

Again, thank you for coming out tonight and hearing all of us. And I think citizens caring about what happens in the school district is phenomenal and kind of odd, and I look around the room, and I see lots of us don't even have kids in the school district anymore, but you understand your tax dollars are going there, you understand the future is enrolled there, and so it's a really big deal. Thank you for being engaged. If you want to know more about our campaign, you can go to our website, [votejeffdonaldson.com](http://votejeffdonaldson.com) I'm excited to bring some fresh eyes of leadership to the school board. I'm excited to join these two and support what's happening on the school board and continue to advance some of these initiatives that we've been talking about here. Continue to grow education, see those test scores come up, make continue to maintain that a rating, get to the next top five in school districts in the state of Florida, and I believe we can do it together.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator 57:03**

Thank you. Mrs. Mason.

**Kelly Mason 57:06**

All right, strong public education is so critical, not just for our state of Florida, but for our country, and there is an effort to dismantle public education, and I know there's a lot of people in this audience who are very aware of what's going on. I appreciate you being here tonight to listen to us as we are running for reelection for the school board, but I highly recommend that you pay very close attention to this governor's race, because it is very critical to the future of education. I would ask that you support me in another four years. I think I've been a bold and courageous leader. I think I've proven myself to some of the people in this audience who campaigned against me, and I think I've seen what I'm really all about. So, I appreciate you giving me a second chance to prove myself. I think we have done great things in these last three years, and almost four. I would like to do four more years for our students in Collier County, and represent all of you. So, hopefully, you'll hire me again. Thank you.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator 58:08**

Thank you. Mr. Moshier.

**Tim Moshier 58:11**

I just like to ask everyone for their vote. It's been a great four years. The board, right now, we're probably about 90 99% on the same page with everything. I'd love to be able to pay your teachers more, but it comes down to you don't have the money from the state. I love public education, that's why I'm here. I think we're doing a great job. I want to continue moving, and with this homeschooling and everything else they do, there's no accountability for a lot of theirs. The kids that have been outside our school system, and come back to home school, they're below grade level, and we have to spend time getting there. So, if you're going to do that, there has to be some accountability for it. So, I'm just pushing for accountability for everything we have. I like, I like the way our school system is going. I like, I think we're going in the right direction. I'd love to get more money from Tallahassee to pay our teachers more, and just have that. So, we've done a great job. I want to continue doing it for another four years, and just ask for your vote. Thank you. If you get anything, it's Tim for Collier. Thank you.

**Michael Wynn, Moderator 59:05**

All right, thank you. So, this concludes our Collier County School Board candidate forum. I want to thank all of our candidates for their time here today, and helping better inform our voters of their choices in this race, and I thought they did all a fantastic job. One minute response times are tough. So, thank you. You guys really made my job easy. Thank you for that. Also, I want to thank NABOR for hosting us, as well as all the volunteers who helped work hard to help us make this event possible. And I want to thank our coalition as well, in Greater Naples Chamber of Commerce, CBIA, NABOR, League of Women Voters, Greater Naples Leadership, Naples Better Government, and finally, a huge thanks to all of you and all of our audience members for taking time out of your busy schedules to be here and to be better informed to make a choice, an informed choice in this upcoming election. So, thank you all, and good night.