

## **Meeting the candidate: John Thomas**

### **1. Why are you running? If elected, what would be your top goals as school board member?**

- My experience as a high school administrator, head varsity football coach, university associate vice president, 14-year career in law enforcement, Vice Mayor /city council member, and now as CEO of the Home Builders and Contractors Association, I have a comprehensive understanding of both educational and vocational issues. A lifelong Brevard County resident with six grandchildren, I am invested in the future of our schools and committed to refocusing our efforts on providing the best education possible for all children.

Issues:

- Ensure a fair, consistent and enforced discipline policy.
- Strengthen our Early Childhood Education program.
- Enhance Career and Technical Education.

### **2. In what school district or community activities/organizations have you been involved?**

- For over 25 years, I have been deeply involved in the community. I have been a coach and the Executive Director of the Greater Melbourne Police Athletic League. Additionally, I volunteered as a community coach with the Eau Gallie High School varsity football program, the South Beach Little League, Brevard County's Youth Football Program, and the Satellite Beach Basketball League. I also served on the board of directors for Neighbor Up Brevard and the Field of Dreams. I was elected two terms on the Melbourne City Council and served on the airport authority for the Melbourne-Orlando International Airport.

### **3. What is the top issue you believe the district needs to address?**

The top issues that need to be addressed include:

- Teacher Pay and Retention
- Return the focus to education and away from social issues
- Restore public faith through transparency and accountability
- Ensure a fair, consistent, and enforced discipline policy
- Improve student reading levels by strengthening the Early Childhood Education program

#### **4. What can be done to ensure everyone who graduates is either ready for college or a vocation?**

- Strengthening Career and Technical Education (CTE) Programs: Align with industry needs, providing students with certifications that are directly applicable in the workforce.
- Expanding Dual Enrollment Opportunities: Offer more dual enrollment courses that allow students to earn college credits while still in high school.
- Personalized Education Plans: Develop individualized education plans for students that identify their strengths, interests and goals, customizing their high school experience to support these objectives.
- Partnerships with Local Businesses and Colleges: Create partnerships with local businesses and colleges to create internship, apprenticeship, and mentorship opportunities that give students insight into various careers.

#### **5. How should the district address underperforming schools?**

- Conduct a thorough analysis to identify the specific factors contributing to underperformance.
- Allocate additional resources to underperforming schools, including counseling for students, specialized instructional support and funding for updated educational materials.
- Provide ongoing professional development for teachers and administrators.
- Foster strong partnerships with parents and the community to create a supportive learning environment.
- Adopt and implement evidence-based programs and practices that have been shown to improve student performance.
- Establish a system for regular monitoring and assessment of student progress and school performance.
- Ensure strong leadership in underperforming schools by appointing experienced and effective principals who can drive positive change.

#### **6. Local and state initiatives have been launched to address the need for more teachers in our classrooms. What more do you think needs to be done to recruit and retain teachers in your district?**

- To effectively recruit and retain teachers, we need competitive salaries and relief from salary compression for experienced teachers. Establish robust mentorship programs for teachers, principals, and assistant principals to create a supportive community. Provide relevant and impactful professional development, along with opportunities for advanced degrees and certifications. Foster a positive, collaborative work environment with a shared goal of excellence.
- Implement policies to reduce administrative burdens, ensure adequate planning time, and support mental health and well-being. Create clear pathways for career advancement within the district.

#### **7. What is your stance on the state's current school choice program?**

- I am concerned that the current school choice program is not meeting its intended goals of equity. While I strongly support parental rights to choose the best educational options for their children, the existing program, including the voucher system, does not effectively enable economically disadvantaged families to make realistic choices.

## **8. Does school testing really give an accurate portrayal of the education quality/experience of a school?**

- School testing is a valuable tool for assessing educational outcomes and ensuring accountability. It highlights areas for improvement and helps ensure academic standards are being met. However, testing results should be complemented by other indicators such as teacher performance, student engagement, and the availability of extracurricular activities to provide a more comprehensive view of a school's effectiveness.

## **9. Issues surrounding gender, sexuality and race have created controversy between school boards and parents. How much say should parents have in deciding what is and is not included in the public school curriculum?**

- Parents should have a significant say in determining what is included in the public-school curriculum. They are the primary stakeholders in their children's education and should have the right to influence educational content, especially on sensitive topics related to gender, sexuality, and race. Parental input helps ensure that the curriculum aligns with community expectations.

## **10. What is your rubric for deciding whether a book should be banned?**

- When deciding whether a book should be banned, the district needs to adhere to state-established standards to ensure consistency and legality. Additionally, assess the book's educational benefits, alignment with academic goals, and suitability for the intended age group. It is also crucial to evaluate how well the book reflects our community's values.

### **11. What is your position on the new law that implements new rules for teacher unions?**

- New regulations have made it more difficult for unions to collect dues through payroll deduction, a method that is both convenient and commonly used. Restricting payroll deductions can create challenges for unions and for teachers who want to participate. A possible adjustment to these regulations could be to include periodic reminders for those using payroll deduction. This would help ensure that teachers stay informed about their payments and continue their membership with clear, informed consent. This approach aims to balance the convenience of automatic payments with the need for transparency and intentionality in union involvement.

### **12. Do you feel students are safe at school? Or does more need to be done to protect school campuses?**

- Brevard Public Schools, in coordination with the Brevard County Sheriff's Office, have made significant strides in ensuring student safety. While much attention is given to responding to school shootings, I believe it is equally crucial to train teachers in de-escalation techniques. Additionally, implementing Proactive Cognitive Fitness Training for students can reduce stress related scenarios. Addressing these areas proactively will help ensure that both teachers and students are better equipped and can reduce safety threats.

### **13. Do you feel any changes are needed to your district's budget? Is money being spent in the right places?**

- I feel like changes in the budget could be made. Our district awards projects that come under The school board must ensure that the annual budget aligns with the district's goals. A comprehensive review is necessary to eliminate waste and guarantee that every tax dollar is spent as efficiently as possible.

## Meeting the candidate: Amber Yantz

### **1. Why are you running? If elected, what would be your top goals as school board member?**

- My family has made Brevard our home and for years I have volunteered in our schools to support teachers and staff. I saw the need for a servant leader on the school board; someone who keeps the focus on students, families and school-based staff. BPS has some amazing academic programs, but the current board has not done enough to create access for all students. If elected, my priorities will include increasing access for both our academic programs and our career and technology education offerings. I will also be focused on teacher retention, and being part of a school board that can make Brevard proud.

### **2. In what school district or community activities/organizations have you been involved?**

- I am on several School Advisory Councils, I am currently help launch the first Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) at Stone Magnet Middle School, and also serve as a committee member on Brevard Children In Brevard.

### **3. What is the top issue you believe the district needs to address?**

- I believe the top issue is teacher retention and recruitment. We need to keep the good teachers in our district while also recruiting the next generation of educators. Employee morale and training play key roles in our effort to retain staff. This board and superintendent have damaged our district's reputation and made employees feel like they don't have a voice. As an organization, BPS leaders need to show empathy and care for the people entrusted to lead our classrooms.

#### **4. What can be done to ensure everyone who graduates is either ready for college or a vocation?**

- The road to graduation begins at home, begins in VPK, and begins in elementary school. Ensuring our students have success through third grade should be a district focus. Research shows that students who can read and write at grade-level in third grade have the best chance to be successful students. The day a student graduates from high school is the second-most important day of their secondary education. The day after graduation is the most important day. The goal of BPS is to ensure each student knows what they are going to do the day after they graduate. The district's mission is to prepare students for college, career, or military service.

#### **5. How should the district address underperforming schools?**

- The role of the school board is to create policy and set a budget. The board can allocate funds to be used on more resources for schools in need. Each school is its own community with its unique strengths and unique challenges. The superintendent is charged with ensuring each student is given the opportunity to be successful. The board is responsible for offering support to the superintendent.

#### **6. Local and state initiatives have been launched to address the need for more teachers in our classrooms. What more do you think needs to be done to recruit and retain teachers in your district?**

- Education needs to be viewed as a noble profession. Education has been under attack over the past several years. Teachers especially need to be supported by parents, colleagues, and the community. Voters showed their support by approving a millage last November that helped increase pay for BPS employees. We need to work to increase wages even further, but we also need to enhance the environment of education in Brevard. Our students and teachers deserve more support.

#### **7. What is your stance on the state's current school choice program?**

- School choice creates competition, which generally brings out the best in people. BPS objectively offers Brevard's best education. BPS has superior academic and extracurricular programs, superior career and technical education programs, and certified teachers. Other educational outlets cannot make those claims.

## **8. Does school testing really give an accurate portrayal of the education quality/experience of a school?**

- When it comes to quality education, standardized test results are only part of the equation. Education also entails teaching students to think for themselves, helping students mature, and preparing students for their futures.

## **9. Issues surrounding gender, sexuality and race have created controversy between school boards and parents. How much say should parents have in deciding what is and is not included in the public school curriculum?**

- We need more families involved in the child's education. The curriculum is not a secret and is available for review. The district does a good job of encouraging public input when new textbooks are being purchased and when new curriculum is being introduced. It is a fallacy to say parental input is not valued by district staff. Some board members may not value parental input, but the staff does.

## **10. What is your rubric for deciding whether a book should be banned?**

- There are very few cases where I believe a book should be pulled from a media center. For several years, BPS has had a procedure in place where parents can alert the school to titles that they don't want their child to check out of the media center. This is a simple, and effective, process. I encourage parents to use the procedure instead of spending their time trying to ban books.

## **11. What is your position on the new law that implements new rules for teacher unions?**

- As a board member I would interact with union leadership during contract negotiations. The new rules directly impact unions and their members more than it will impact a school board.

**12. Do you feel students are safe at school? Or does more need to be done to protect school campuses?**

- Our schools are safe and provide both physical and emotional security for our students and staff. The goal is to continually evaluate security protocols and to never get complacent. Security is something that is practiced every day.

**13. Do you feel any changes are needed to your district's budget? Is money being spent in the right places?**

- The board should focus on paying our staff a respectful wage, purchasing academic materials that enhance a student's educational experience, and investing in our infrastructure.