

Meeting the candidate: Keith Schachter

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

- I am running because our school district needs more effective leadership. We have allowed partisan politics to influence how our system is run and that is wrong. My top goal would be to bring decorum back to our board so that we can work together to implement much needed changes. I can draw on my 17 years of experience in the schools (teacher, school administrator, Magnet School Coordinator), and many years outside the schools as a business owner and ad sales executive to inject positive and much needed change to our schools. The incumbent has caused too much division, and he must be voted out office.

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

- I have been active on the leadership council for Take Stock in Children, which is under the purview of the Brevard Schools Foundation. I sit on the board for the Eau Gallie Arts District Mainstreet. I am a regular supporter of the Parker Foundation that provides all sorts of support to children with Autism. Additionally, my company has raised over \$1 million dollars of unrestricted funds for schools in Brevard.

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

- Declining student enrollment — We have seen student enrollment decline at a rapid rate over the past few years. This has crippled our system by reducing our budget. Most of the public may not be aware that student enrollment is directly tied to state funding. If we don't have the money, we can't sustain our school system.

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

- Start focusing on Career & Technical Education in the earlier grades. Kids get their 1st taste of other educational offerings too late. We focus too much on testing in grades 1-8, and by the time our students reach HS, we have lost some. This is wrong. We need to de-emphasise testing and re-invigorate the curriculum. Students in the earlier grades are bored.

5. How should the district address underperforming schools?

- We know through research that the single most influential factor in student achievement is effective teaching. We should incentivize teachers to want to teach in underperforming schools with with better pay. Typically, underperforming schools reside in areas that serve underprivileged students. This makes classroom management more challenging because many students need additional support and services. We need to attract the best teachers to teach at these schools.

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?

- Make teaching a profession that is revered, championed, and respected. If you ask a dozen random teachers if they'd recommend the profession, I'd bet most would not in this climate. Teachers should be afforded more autonomy, better professional development, and be given more freedom to teach. Teachers today are afraid. The climate and culture needs to change. We also need to do a better job at making a push to attract younger teachers in the profession. This starts with being more involved in recruitment faors and with the local universities. When new teachers enter the system, we need to provide better support so we can keep them.

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

- Public schools have not been getting the job done, so I cannot blame parents for taking advantage of other options. But, our state is responsible for this too. Often school choices don't come with the same rules. If public schools have to use certain testing mechanisms to evaluate efficacy, so too should schools of choice. Sometimes, I feel as if the system is rigged to decentralize public education altogether. We can't control the politics, but we can control how good our schools are, so we need to focus on improving our curriculum so that we attract the students who have left back into our school system.

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

- Absolutely not. The testing is a disaster. Our system only values a narrow set of skills, and so the kids that test well are set up to succeed, but they are not challenged. The kids that do not test well are typically given more of what they have shown not to be good at. I feel this is unfair. We need to provide students with curriculum opportunities that are outside of just the things we test. How do we know that an extra arts class, or technology class won't inspire a student to do better in reading or math? In the end, most kids leave the system ill prepared for life because our system focuses on the wrong things and puts way too much stock in testing.

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?

- This depends on the topic. Overall, we need to teach our kids to be accepting and respectful of all people, regardless of sexual orientation, race, religious beliefs, political affiliation, etc. But, we do not need to provide coursework in this stuff, because many of these issues are for adults. Coursework in things like Critical Race Theory, Theology, and religion should be content that is a choice to learn in higher education. In primary and secondary grades, we need to focus on life skills and History. In regards to history, I find it unacceptable to water down content that is undeniable fact, regardless of how it portrays on our national heritage. Slavery happened; The Jim Crow Laws were real; persecution of women and native Americans happened; The Holocaust happened, and many nations, including the US, didn't do enough to stop it. The list goes on and on. No parent has the right to stop us from teaching our students these facts. That is what private school is for. Parents can choose to pay for other options if what we teach does not align to their values.

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

- Banning policies in general don't work. There have been way too many resources allocated to argue about many books. We have bigger fish to fry. I think we need to do a better job at vetting what titles are available in public school libraries. I have seen a few titles that are way too violent or explicit for children. So I do not blame the parents that raise the concerns. But I disagree with blaming everything on the schools. If the parents don't want their kids to have access to certain titles, they can simply submit a list to the schools. It would not be too hard to implement a system that flags certain titles. But when we are banning classic books in our schools, all because extremists don't want them, that is where I draw the line.

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

- I disagree with the new laws. It is an attack against the unions. Unions have always served an important role, and I think we ought to afford teachers job protections if they choose to pay union dues. I have more of a problem with overpaid Union leaders. When you have leadership that is compensated far beyond what the teachers are paid, it opens up another can of worms.

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

- No. Emphatically NO. Our schools do a good job at fortifying our buildings. We have security call in buttons, bullet proof glass in the front office, gates and security windows, and armed personnel to include School resource officers and potentially “guardians”. All of these measures are great at protecting students from threats on the outside. But, do they feel safe inside? When we have shortages of teachers and substitutes, when we force other job duties on school guidance counselors and support staff, etc. We simply do not have enough human resources in our school buildings to provide for student safety. If I have to send a student to receive needed help, and the resource for that student is not available because they are administering a test or covering a class, we create an unsafe environment inside. Student safety should not only be about the physical. Do they feel safe mentally and emotionally? I would argue no. And I was a teacher and school administrator for years. So unlike most folks, I have had a birds eye view.

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

- Yes. Emphatically YES! I say we spend way too much on curricular resources, unnecessary software subscriptions, and testing administration. I do not know how much this all entails, but I know it is a lot. How much has Algebra changed? Or what is that different about World History? Why do we have to go through textbook adoptions every 6 years to purchase books at exhorbinant costs that are produced by the same companies that make and implement the stadardized testing? I say we are allowing textbook companies run our schools, and I think it is time we STOP this madness. Add in unnecessary district leadership positions and we have a HUGE spending problem. We need to place more paid human resources in the classrooms and inside the school walls.

Meeting the candidate: Ava Taylor

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

- I have served in the United States Navy for nearly 18 years and plan to retire after 20 years. I am poised to serve both my country and the families of Brevard. My candidacy is driven by a commitment to transparency, integrity, and excellence, ensuring all children access a safe and supportive educational environment. After witnessing firsthand the impacts of partisan politics on school board decisions, including an inadequate response to my son's hazing incident at Viera High School, I aim to lead with a balanced, nonpartisan approach. My goals include retaining and supporting teachers, enhancing student achievement, and demonstrating accountable leadership.

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

- I actively participate in the district's Discipline Plan Working Group and Community/BIPOC meetings and attend school board meetings. I enjoy mentoring with Take Stock in Children and Top Teens of America, participating in activities like Trash Bash, and serving meals to those in need. Additionally, I hold leadership roles, including Secretary for the Central Brevard NAACP and membership in Top Ladies of Distinction. I support The Children's Hunger Project, engage with the Cocoa Beach Chamber's Military Affairs Council, and volunteer with other organizations. I view community involvement as a fundamental aspect of our democratic process.

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

- Our district's top issue is the dual challenge of a growing teacher shortage coupled with declining student enrollment. Addressing the teacher shortage is crucial, as it directly impacts student achievement and school culture. We must make teaching in our district more attractive through competitive salaries, enhanced benefits, and robust professional development opportunities. Simultaneously, we must understand and tackle the underlying factors causing lower student enrollment, such as demographic shifts or satisfaction with the education provided. Developing strategies that focus on retaining and recruiting students and teachers will be essential for the vitality and sustainability of our schools.

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

- To ensure every graduate is prepared for college or a vocation, we must enhance our academic rigor and strengthen the foundation laid in elementary school, emphasizing family involvement and continuous educational support. Our district's robust Career and Technical Education (CTE) program is recognized as one of the best in the state. Moving forward, we must enhance access to these valuable programs by expanding their availability throughout the district, which could involve setting up centralized facilities, broadening program locations, and addressing transportation barriers. Focusing on these areas can better prepare our students for future educational and vocational opportunities.

5. How should the district address underperforming schools?

- To effectively address underperforming schools, the district must implement tailored strategies that consider the unique challenges faced by each school, from administration to students. Many underperformance issues stem from socio-economic factors, necessitating targeted support to help students focus on learning. This should include both educational and socio-emotional resources. Additionally, underperforming schools require increased district support, such as additional funding and resources. Integrating volunteer programs can also provide critical support, offering tutoring, mentoring, and extra-curricular opportunities. Together, these measures will help create an environment where every student has the chance to succeed.

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?

- Local and state initiatives to address the teacher shortage are a start, but more focused efforts are necessary to attract and retain educators in our district. We need to raise salaries across the board, not just for first-year teachers, aiming to place our district in at least the top half for teacher compensation statewide. Additionally, we must provide comprehensive support for teachers' professional knowledge, including robust development opportunities and clear paths for career advancement. Creating a supportive work environment that values and recognizes teachers' contributions is crucial for boosting job satisfaction and retention, making our district an attractive place for educators.

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

- The state's school choice program ensures every child can access a high-quality education tailored to their needs. I support school choice, including public, charter, private, or homeschooling options, as it empowers parents to select the best educational environments for their children. However, these programs must be accountable and equitable. All schools receiving public funds must meet rigorous standards to ensure academic quality. We must ensure that school choice is accessible to all families, supporting a system that respects parental decisions while strengthening public schools to serve the broader educational needs effectively.

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

- While school testing plays a role in evaluating educational quality, it is only a part of the broader picture. Standardized tests measure specific academic abilities under constrained conditions, which might only partially reflect a student's comprehensive learning or a school's overall effectiveness. A thorough assessment of a school's quality should also include factors such as the classroom environment, teacher-student dynamics, availability of extracurricular activities, and levels of student engagement. Integrating these elements with test scores offers a more complete and nuanced view of the educational experience and effectiveness of a school.

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?

- Issues surrounding gender, sexuality, and race are indeed sensitive and sometimes controversial in the context of school curriculums. As a school board member, I believe that parents should have a significant say in their children's education, especially concerning topics like sexual education. Parents should be allowed to review such curriculums and retain the right to opt-out if they find the content objectionable. For all subjects, ensuring that the material is accurate and age-appropriate is crucial. Active parental involvement and clear communication between schools and families are crucial for maintaining trust as the district aligns with state educational standards.

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

- State requirements and the expertise of certified media specialists would ground my rubric. It should assess the educational value and age appropriateness of a book. Input from educators, parents, and students through transparent discussions would also be integral. The decision to remove a book would require a consensus that its content significantly impedes educational goals or fails to meet academic standards, ensuring the process is balanced, thoughtful, and focused on fostering a conducive learning environment.

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

- As a school board member, my role is to support our teachers, who are fundamental to our students' educational success. My position is cautious regarding the new law implementing rules for teacher unions. While I understand the intent behind legislative changes, any law that potentially puts our teachers at risk or undermines their ability to advocate for themselves and their profession is concerning. We must maintain a supportive environment for our educators. Therefore, I advocate for policies that strengthen, rather than diminish, the rights and supports of teachers, ensuring their voices remain influential in shaping our educational landscape.

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

- Our schools met the safety standards per the latest Office of Safe Schools assessment, but continuous vigilance is necessary. I support the presence of professionally trained School Resource Officers (SROs) on campuses. However, I have reservations about the expanded guardian program that allows non-classroom staff to become armed guardians. We must consider the interactions between armed guardians and students, who often frequent hallways and common areas. Our safety strategies must prioritize minimizing risks while enhancing security comprehensively.

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

- While the school board has effectively secured funds for basic needs, we must advocate for additional state funding to enhance our educational offerings. My consultations with business professionals have deepened my understanding of our budgetary constraints. Although it is possible to identify areas for cuts, budgeting for a school district involves complex allocation challenges that are not easily resolved by simple reductions. Establishing a Budget Oversight Committee comprising district officials and local financial experts could be instrumental. This committee would scrutinize the budget, identify inefficiencies, and recommend improvements, ensuring funds are used effectively and strategically.

13 QUESTIONS FROM **SPECTRUM NEWS**

Meet the Candidate: Max Madl

1. I am running for School Board because I believe in diversifying the perspectives on the board by bringing in a student view. As a student in Brevard Public Schools for the last 13 years, I have seen where our students and staff need support, and I am ready to assist them. Some current areas of concern include the ongoing mental health crisis inside of our schools among teachers and students, getting parents involved in their child's education, teacher pay issues, and the amount of debt Brevard Public Schools is currently in.

2. I have been a member and have served as the Secretary of Viera High's Student Government Association where we put together projects focusing on building a school community, improving faculty and staff relations and morale, and assisting the community outside of school. As a member of Viera High's School Advisory Committee, I assist in recommending where our funding should be going. I have consistently advocated for this money to be used in the best interests of the students and plan to continue to do so on a wider scale at the district level.

3. The top issue Brevard Public Schools needs to address is the ongoing mental health crisis. Nearly half of the student population experiences mental health related issues. By increasing funding and resources to this area, we can ensure our students and not only physically safe, but mentally safe as well. After all, if a student does not feel safe in their learning environment, they will not learn.

4. All students choose their own paths. Some are more fit for college, while others are ready to go straight into the workforce. By improving the availability of Career and Technical Education programs in Brevard County, we can ensure that every student discovers their own path. Here on the Space Coast, we have numerous engineering and aerospace jobs. My plan is to increase the amount of Career and Technical Education programs relating to engineering and aerospace so students can have a job with a Brevard County company after finishing high school or college.

5. To address underperforming schools, the district needs to implement strategies such as providing additional resources and support to struggling schools, implementing professional development programs for teachers, conducting regular assessments to identify areas needing improvement, and fostering partnerships with the community to create a supportive network for the schools. By taking a comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of underperformance, schools can work towards improvement and better outcomes for students.

6. To recruit and retain more teachers in our district, we should focus on increasing teacher salaries to make the profession more attractive, offering competitive benefits, and creating a supportive work environment. Additionally, providing opportunities for professional development and career advancement can help retain teachers. We should also consider mentorship programs for new teachers to help them transition smoothly into their roles. Finally, our teachers are sick of having to teach straight out of a textbook. By giving teachers the autonomy to teach on their own, we can not only ensure that teacher morale will increase, but students will learn more as well.

7. I support Florida's current school choice program because it empowers parents to select the best educational setting for their children. This program fosters competition among schools, driving them to improve and innovate. It also ensures that students have access to unique learning environments, tailored to their unique needs and strengths. By offering more options, we can help every child receive a quality education that sets them up for success.

8. School testing can provide some insights into the education quality of a school, but it doesn't always give a complete picture. While standardized tests can measure certain academic skills and knowledge, they often miss other important aspects like critical thinking and creativity. Additionally, factors such as teaching methods, school resources, and student support systems play a significant role in the overall educational experience. Therefore, it's important to consider multiple measures, including student engagement, teacher evaluations, and school climate, to get a more comprehensive understanding of a school's quality.

9. Parents should definitely have a voice in their children's education, as they know their kids best and have a vested interest in their well-being and development. However, it's also important to balance this with the expertise of educators and the need to provide a comprehensive, inclusive education that prepares students for the real world. Collaboration between parents, teachers, and school boards can help ensure that the curriculum reflects community values while also meeting educational standards and promoting critical thinking and understanding of complex social issues.

10. My personal rubric for whether or not a book should be removed from a school library is dependent on the content within the book. The example I like to use is the fact that students, on their own, are prohibited from going to see a rated R movie. If rated R content were to be found inside of a book, it should not be on the shelves in front of children.

11. I believe the new law implementing rules for teacher unions is an important step towards ensuring transparency and accountability. These measures are designed to make sure that unions operate in the

best interests of all teachers and students. By requiring regular recertification and transparent financial reporting, we can help ensure that union activities are aligned with our education values.

12. I feel students are currently safe at school, however, there is always room for improvement. Obviously, we do not want to go overboard with our security policies, but we do need to enact policies that will guarantee our students are safe.

13. I believe that our district's budget could definitely use some adjustments. We need to focus more on reducing debt and increasing teacher pay. Ensuring that our teachers are well-compensated is crucial for attracting and retaining high-quality educators, which directly impacts student success. By prioritizing these areas, we can create a more sustainable financial future for our district while also improving the overall quality of education.