

Meeting the candidate: Stephanie Arguello

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

- My Why? I am Team Florida. I was born and raised right here in Central Florida, and am a proud product of public schools right here. (Rockledge HS graduate). As a coach's kid, I had the greatest example of leadership in my own father, who led both on and off the court. And most importantly, I care deeply about the future of our communities and believe access to a high-quality education for all is worth fighting for. Seminole County has and continues to provide an academically excellent education to students. I am running to address the issues which surround and greatly impact academics. Addressing new issues such as ethics in tech used in education, navigating social media and mobile phone use, both which are heavily embedded in today's classrooms require a collaborative problem solver to bring people together to find real solutions. I am also excited to bring together community experts to help address the continued need to ensure SCPS can be a competitive employer, providing livable wage to all employees, and address opportunities to establish a more fair and graduated pay scale that rewards teachers throughout the duration of their career. We want to attract new talent, AND keep the incredibly dedicated teachers who have continued to make SCPS an A school year over year. My experience bringing together stakeholders and subject matter experts, will prove a positive and effective addition to an already well-versed board. When elected, my focus will be bringing my experience as a leader of collaborative problem-solving efforts, to help find solutions that will work for our district. I would like to bring a renewed focus to community-informed decision making, to ensure that new policies consider diverse perspectives, and are developed with the community that will be impacted. In addition, my public health expertise will prove useful as we work to address the mental health of students, and issues like chronic absenteeism.

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

- During my time at the Orlando Science Center, I spent three years teaching science, with a focus on health science to k-12 students in Central Florida and beyond. After joining AdventHealth in 2011, I helped to develop and launch Mission:Fit Possible, a health and wellness program that provided education to k-8 students at schools, community centers and summer camps across Orange, Osceola and Seminole County. During my 11 years at AdventHealth, I worked with countless nonprofit organizations serving the tri-county area, as well as had the pleasure to co-lead the 2022 Community Health Needs Assessment, which brought together the departments of health, federally qualified health centers, and organizations and leaders across Central Florida to identify shared community health improvement priorities. I served on the board for both the Primary Care Access Network, and Polis Institute, two community-serving organizations. I also participated on the Infant Mortality Task Force for Orange County, as well as served on the advisory committee for the Edyth Bush Foundation's Evoking Change Task Force. I have also volunteered my time as a yoga instructor for multiple nonprofits, in the Central Florida area, after earning my yoga teacher certification in 2020.

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

- Seminole County has like many other counties across the country, experienced an increase in chronic absenteeism from students. This, coupled with an increase in mental health need, prove to be two of the biggest issues the district is working to address. Having a public health professional on the board provides an additional perspective that is extremely valuable for these complex issues which require creative and innovative solutions.

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

- Seminole County has done a great job creating multiple pathways for success. Students are encouraged to find their "e", which includes either being enlisted, enrolled, or employed. I believe in addition to equipping students with a plan and opportunity for exposure, we must support the health of students, especially with navigating both the digital and physical environment. We must embrace new technology, and educate students to navigate the digital world, especially with the prominence of social media and AI which are changing how students experience learning. It's time to modernize our policies to ensure that SCPS remains a pioneer, who not only embraces technology, but is proactive in creating healthy pathways for students to experience and become responsible citizens in our now hybrid world.

5. How should the district address underperforming schools?

- Underperforming schools can thrive with customized support based on their unique needs. The district can continue to prioritize these identified schools, working to understand what barriers are negatively impacting performance, and create realistic, customized solutions that lead to measurable improvement. I would recommend applying the iceberg method, to look below the surface of performance, and find the root causes. These are typically much harder to address, but can have the greatest impact. Our job as a district is to ensure the environment we provide has the right elements for children to thrive. And this may mean taking extra time to understand the perspective of students, parents and those who are experiencing the school system. By gaining a deeper understanding of what isn't working, we can better use our limited resources for the greatest amount of impact.

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?

- Seminole County must remain a competitive employer not only to attract new teachers, but to keep the talented teachers that already work within the system along with all the team members who make SCPS an A rated system. There is an opportunity to re-evaluate how experienced teachers wage grows over time, to balance attracting and keeping talent. I think this question is best answered with direct input from teachers, who are the impacted population. I would suggest facilitating focus group sessions to identify common themes directly from teachers perspective. This coupled with a comparison to outside systems with similar constraints, that have the retention rate we aspire to, will give us the best opportunity for successful implementation of a solution.

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

- Parenting is hard. I am watching my own child navigate this unfamiliar world and I understand as a parent, that we have to make the decision that is going to suit our unique learners best. I spoke to a mom recently who had three kids with wildly different needs, which ended up meaning a split between public and private education. Parents deserve to choose. What I know is an ongoing challenge surrounded to this notion, is the question of whether funding should remain within the public school, or follow that child. This is another issue that is not black and white. I would advocate for keeping funding in the school, while also working with our elected officials and local organizations to identify alternative funding pathways for those families who seek a different educational solution for their children. While the funding remains, we must also hold ourselves accountable to ensure that we are providing the highest quality of education possible to all students. This is much easier said than done when the student population is so diverse and comes with diverse needs. We must consider how to best meet the needs of the masses, while simultaneously innovating for students of varying ability levels, mental and behavioral needs, and with whatever challenges our students may face on a daily basis.

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

- I relate school testing to BMI. This was once considered to be THE determining factor of health. But we have learned over time, that BMI can't possibly account for all of the nuances that make up whether someone is at a healthy weight. School testing is similar. Testing students against a standard provides an opportunity to determine where they are operating compared to others. I'm an advocate for utilizing school testing as measure. It is important to also seek feedback from those currently experiencing the system, families, and key stakeholders that can provide a more holistic portrayal of the quality and experience of schools.

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?

- I believe that like many districts, SCPS navigated legislation that left a lot to interpretation as it relates to navigating parent engagement in school curriculum. I am an advocate for creating an option for a parent to opt their child out, rather than all children having something removed. There is a more balanced approach that can be taken to ensure that alternative options are provided for the few parents that express concern, while enabling students to still access appropriate curriculum.

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

- Similar to the previous question about public school curriculum, I believe that there is a more balanced approach that can be taken to ensure that alternative options are provided for the few parents that express concern, while enabling students to still access appropriate books.

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

- We must look at the impact that new laws have had, and strive to address potential unintended consequences. By shifting how teachers can pay union fees, a reduction has been seen in participation. We must look at the consequences, and find ways to mitigate them for future effectiveness of the union.

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

- As a mom, I do experience fear sending my daughter to school. This world is a scary place. Our students do active shooter drills and are exposed to so much both physically and digitally.
- More can be done, by leaning into existing partnerships with our Sheriff and police departments, and working to increase efforts for proactive education, and increased community building across Seminole to ensure safety in our schools. With our world changing, and students living both in a digital and physical world, we must also stay above the curve with our policies surrounding digital safety. Educating students and families to be responsible digital citizens can make a difference in creating a safe environment both in classrooms, and online.

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

- I appreciate the transparency of SCPS, and know that budget challenges are extremely complicated. This for me is another opportunity to have a fresh perspective to come challenge the status quo. Evaluation of current spending, especially seeking out areas where there may be duplicative spending (i.e. different schools using different applications for the same purpose) could provide a portion of savings. This will need to be coupled with community and higher level advocacy to support efforts for the continuation of the penny tax, and identification of new streams of income into the system.

Meeting the candidate: Kelly Critz

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

- I am running because, as the mother of three young children and a public school graduate myself, I want to make sure Seminole County's public schools are preparing our children for college or a career. If elected, I will (1) get cell phones out of the classrooms because they are the single biggest distraction from learning, (2) improve child literacy rates by returning to phonics and textbooks, and (3) mandate financial literacy education so every graduate knows how to balance a checkbook and responsibly use credit.

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

- I have been a coach at ACE Gymnastics and worked as a teacher at Masters Academy when my children were enrolled there for preschool in 2021. I am also actively engaged in service at my church, East Coast Believers Church in Oviedo. I have only recently engaged the Seminole County Public School (SCPS) district by reaching out to volunteer at the local elementary school, Woodlands Elementary. My oldest child is 5 and would be enrolling at Woodlands for Kindergarten.

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

- The most important issue is getting cell phones out of classrooms. There are countless studies about how the constant connectivity of smartphones and social media is making it harder for our children to learn and worsening teenage bullying and mental health issues. The solution is a districtwide ban, where phones are not allowed in classrooms during instructional time.

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

- Great schools start with great teachers. I was lucky to have them when I was in school and want to make sure we recruit and retain them today. That means getting politics out of the classroom, stopping distracting cell phone use that forces teachers to act as “cell phone police,” and giving teachers the training and resources they need. I also want to expand our vocational offerings so students can pursue a career in the skilled trades without being burdened by student debt. In particular, I would explore partnerships with local businesses and community colleges to help students pursue certifications and apprenticeships.

5. How should the district address underperforming schools?

- Establish the specific metrics they are expected to demonstrate immediate improvement on and facilitate meetings with faculty to engage both teachers and leadership in the course of action to improve those metrics. I believe that there is a gap between the administration driven actions to address “poor performance” and the faculty and community’s preferred course of action. I would seek to generate a psychologically safe environment where all perspectives are heard and all recommended courses of action are considered.

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?

- While the district needs to pay a competitive salary, we should not look at pay increases as the only way to recruit and retain teachers. It is just as important to give teachers a supportive work environment. I believe taking cell phones out of our classrooms will make a major impact in allowing teachers to focus on teaching, instead of constantly having to police students' cell phone use and other behavior. Additionally, I believe improving school security measures will make teachers safer and more comfortable at work, removing a major reason for attrition and job loss.

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

- I support Governor DeSantis's school choice program and will work to make sure it is implemented successfully here in Seminole County. I went to our public schools and was prepared for university when I received a full scholarship for gymnastics despite coming from a family struggling with substance abuse. However, I want to empower parents to pick whatever education is best for their child.

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

- School testing is important to making sure our children are learning, especially because it allows us to identify declining achievement early and take steps to address it. However, it is not the only measurement of school experience. Students need to feel safe in school and should have a supportive environment free of bullying. Those cannot be measured on a standardized test but are crucial to our childrens' success.

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?

- Like anything, parental involvement in public school curriculum is a balancing act. Transparency is key. Every parent should know what their child is being taught and, when reasonable, be able to opt-out of topics like sex education. I am also a supporter of the school choice programs that allow parents to place their children into the educational environment that's best for them.

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

- Books in school libraries need to be age-appropriate, especially about sex and sexuality. The recent controversy about this issue is not because of concerned parents, it's because extreme content has been put into school libraries, including in our elementary schools. Governor DeSantis has recently passed common sense legislation, which I support, that makes sure our children are not exposed to sexualized content without their parents' consent. I would support that law on the school board and make sure it is enforced in Seminole County.

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

- Requiring unions to be supported by dues-paying members is just common sense. Too many public sector unions are just mouthpieces for extreme, far-left ideology that doesn't reflect their members' opinions. If teachers in Seminole County or anywhere else want to support their union, they can do so. Organizations that are not supported by their members should not be unfairly propped up by Florida taxpayers.

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

- Seminole County schools are mostly safe but we should still do more to improve school security. I support hiring more school resources officers, both to intervene in the tragic event of a mass shooting and be the eyes and ears of law enforcement when it comes to criminal activity in our schools. My proposal to get cellphones out of classrooms will also improve safety because constant social media usage is a major contributor to bullying, mental health challenges, and adolescent violence.

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

- I do believe that adjustments can be made in the district's budget. I do not support an increase in millage at this time. Core competencies in transportation, food provisions, and facilities deserve a cursory review, however their growth is below the average over the last 10 years. Instructional and administrative technology, some curriculum development, and certain student services should be reviewed for efficiency and effectiveness. Some general and school administration budget line items could also be reviewed. There may be opportunity for nominal investment income as seen in the county budget given the self-insurance program and the annual budgeting process.

13 QUESTIONS FROM **SPECTRUM NEWS**

Meet the Candidate: Abby Sanchez

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

As a 26-year veteran teacher, parent, and community leader, it's imperative to have an experienced educator who has walked in their shoes. My top goals are to continue advocating for students, teachers, parents, and all faculty. I will work tirelessly to explore solutions for teacher wage increases while improving the morale of our staff and reducing workload. I will continue exploring solutions to provide resolutions for fair raises. Mental health is critical for the well-being of our students, families, teachers, and all employees. I want all children to be held accountable. I feel that many students are pushed through the system for a higher graduation rate. It's critical that our children develop lifelong skills while obtaining educational gains. We have implemented many supports and resources, and I will continue to advocate for more.

Truancy and behavioral issues are another priority; when students are not held accountable for missed classes or unexcused full-day absences, they lack the educational gains and life-skill preparation required for college, technical schools, or employment post-high school.

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

Chair of the Seminole County School Board (previously Vice Chair), Seminole County Cultural Arts Council, American Cancer Society Basecamp Executive Board, Central Florida Public School Board Coalition, Seminole County Mayors and Managers Council, Central Florida Value Adjustment Board, SCPS Business Advisory Board, the Foundation of Seminole County Public Schools, all chapters of the Seminole County Chamber of Commerce, board member for Ali's Hope, Seminole Health Advisory Board, Central Florida Zoo and Botanical Gardens Board of Trustees, Leadership Seminole (Class 28), student mentor to SCPS students, Lake Brantley Athletic Boosters, Lake Brantley High School PTSA, and State PTA/PTSA

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

Mental wellness for our employee morale. Our team are the leaders students rely on as educators, mentors, and community leaders. They must be appreciated and know that we support their needs since their impact on our community children is essential. We need to strengthen our relationships so they feel confident they can come to us without fear of repercussions. Truancy and behavioral issues are highly concerning, and we must ensure that all our students are held accountable! Additionally, we need to communicate initiatives and/or policy changes to be transparent. Finally, our employees deserve fair compensation for their time and dedication to our students.

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

SCPS, students, and parents must collaborate on this goal. Success does not always translate to college. I will continue to raise awareness of paths outside of college. Currently, we have fifty-three industry-certified programs through partnerships with Seminole State College and UCF. Partnering with local businesses will support the establishment of new programs based on students' interests. For those choosing the college path, I will continue to advocate for magnet programs and international baccalaureate programs, to name a few.

5. How should the district address underperforming schools? Reword

We must ensure schools have staff and funding while providing resources for their teachers and students. In some schools, teachers and administration may need additional support specific to their student's needs.

In high schools, we will continue expanding our online course options to provide students with flexibility. I will advocate for continuing to implement positive behavior reinforcement programs for our students in tandem with team training related to the social-emotional connection needed for our students to learn.

Lastly, regular attendance accountability is a must. I was part of the team that helped create the "Student Success Express," a mobile registration and family resource vehicle that brings essential services directly to the communities we serve. As stated on our SCPS website, "This innovative initiative will enhance our efforts to provide convenient access to educational resources, support services, and employment opportunities within SCPS. The Student Success Express is a mobile hub where families can receive translation assistance for student registration, connect with vital school and community resources, and explore job openings within the school district. This initiative underscores SCPS's commitment to ensuring that all families have easy access to the support they need for their children's educational success.

Key Features of the Student Success Express Include:

1. Mobile Registration Assistance: Families receive help with the registration process, including translation services, ensuring that language barriers do not hinder access to education.
2. Resource Connection: The vehicle provides information on various school and community resources, including academic programs, extracurricular activities, health services, and more.
3. Employment opportunities are created."

6. Local and state initiatives have been launched to address the need for more classroom teachers. What more do you think needs to happen to recruit and retain teachers in your district?

Shortages in school districts are an epidemic across our nation. The key is to help reduce this issue in our district by ensuring our teachers and staff are appropriately supported and compensated for their work. They need to feel valued, supported, and appreciated for their contributions while having the resources

they need readily available to support their classroom needs. We must work diligently with our department heads to examine the budget and see how we can make adjustments to ensure that wasteful spending is cut and those dollars are reassigned to address budgetary concerns in other areas.

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

I do this because of my passion for education and supporting our community's success. Whether it is unique learning abilities or parents wanting a faith-based school, I support parents having the right to send their children to any school they choose. However, the money attached to each child's funding must follow the student when school changes occur. Additionally, private and charter schools need to be treated just like public schools in terms of certification requirements, safety standards, and curriculum.

8. Does school testing accurately portray a school's education quality/experience?

While no test can be 100% accurate in measuring the growth and needs of our students, the progress monitoring that we currently use does provide a much more accurate picture of student performance on an individual basis. Unlike previous assessments where students were measured and graded against their peers, testing now measures the students against only themselves to check for growth and to ensure that any areas of concern for the student's progress are immediately addressed. However, our students are over-tested. Our teachers want and need their classrooms back to cover the curriculum.

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 or is not included in the public school curriculum?

I support and welcome parent engagement. Parents have a right to participate in curriculum development and implementation as any other stakeholder. Developing and implementing a curriculum is a long and detailed process, and the wants and needs of all stakeholders must be considered when selecting a curriculum that will benefit our students most. However, our educational expert's input is critical during the reviews.

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

It is best for parents to decide what they want their children to read at their age level. When my children were growing up, I would review each book individually to determine if it was appropriate for them. I'd look at the vocabulary level and content, then weigh it against my children's reading level and maturity to decide whether it was appropriate for them. Parents should make individual choices for their children rather than take the drastic step of banning books.

11. What is your position on the new law implementing new teacher union rules?

It only hampers teachers' unions and their membership. This is America, and if our educators desire to join an organization that supports them in their careers and helps them improve their role as teachers, then whose business is it to interfere with their personal choice to be members and pay dues?

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

Overall, students, faculty, and staff feel safe at their schools. However, security measures and safeguards must be consistently enforced across all our campuses. Additionally, we must continually review and evaluate our school security plans to abide by our state laws. We need the state to allocate more funding to our schools so we may operate at maximum efficiency. We are fortunate that we were the first county in Florida to implement School Resource Officers/School Resource Deputies to provide additional safety measures on campuses. Our partnership with the Seminole County Sheriff's Department benefits the students, faculty, and families.

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

We appropriately utilize our district's budget for facilities and how we maintain them. However, we must do more for our employees regarding their insurance and compensation. Currently, insurance costs to our employees are too elevated, and their compensation doesn't support this reoccurring expense. I will explore plan options while creating fair and equitable compensation for all employees.