



CANDIDATE SPOTLIGHT

KARI LABELL

SCHOOL BOARD - CATOCTIN DISTRICT

CANDIDATE: **KARI LABELL**

OFFICE: **LOUDOUN COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD, CATOCTIN DISTRICT**

WEBSITE: Kariforcatoctin.com

What would you like voters to know about you?

I am the only candidate out of all the candidates who has worked full time as a classroom teacher in our public schools.

How long have you lived in Loudoun County?

My husband and I moved here to an old farmhouse in Lovettsville in December of 1993. That's almost 30 years! Currently we have a foxhound, Simon and a Haflinger stallion, Winnie. We have four grown sons, seven grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

What do you like about living in Loudoun County?

I like the countryside, the people, Loudoun history, old houses, and all the old historic roads.

Why did you decide to run for School Board?

I felt a call to do this. Before I retired in 2017 I was part of a cadre of teachers who helped make Loudoun County Public Schools not only one of the finest schools in Virginia but known world-wide. Then I started hearing what was being done to our schools. I started hearing from friends across the country and even from Europe! We were now known for the disgraceful things happening here. It made me extremely angry, so I'm back and in it for the kids!

I am particularly angry about the treatment of our special education population. I had a sister with Down's Syndrome, and growing up I was very protective of her. You could say what you wanted about me, but DON'T dare say anything bad about my sister. Over the years this attitude has transferred to the students I teach and expanded to include all the students in our schools. I will not stand for the mental, physical, emotional and educational abuse of children!

I had been retired for eight years after teaching for fifty years, with the last 30 years here in Loudoun.

After earning my doctorate I was made the vocational assessment and placement coordinator for all the special needs students in the county. For high school special education students, I taught skills such as housekeeping, cooking simple meals, using money, bagging and stocking groceries, copying, typing, answering phones and taking accurate phone messages. Carpentry skills were also addressed, using basic tools and refinishing furniture. I have worked in all the middle and high schools, in the county, as well as worked with our 18 to 22-year-old programs. After retiring, I worked in the private sector finding jobs for adults with special needs. I continue to teach special needs students in the Children's Ministry at Cornerstone Chapel.

What are the main issues you would like to work on as a School Board member?

One thing that most concerns parents is the co-ed bathroom/locker room issue and I have a plan to deal with it.

I would also like to return our classes to the traditional curriculum and replace the current history program with the Project 1776 curriculum and exchange the SEL sessions for tutoring in order to raise reading and math scores.

The over-use of computer-based instruction is also an issue. Teachers aren't teaching, but putting kids on computers and focusing on disadvantaged children, while students who are doing well are not being taught, and parents have to pick up the slack.

Parents' newest concern is start times for fall. Parents object to having elementary students standing outside in the dark as early as 5:30 a.m. for bus pick-up. Starting high schoolers earlier in the day and moving the elementary students to the later start time would keep the younger students safer while waiting for the bus and permit an earlier finish time for the high school students. This would allow high school students to get jobs, finish athletic practices earlier, or even be home to care for younger siblings when they arrive from school.

We also need to get back to basics and get actual input from parents. I helped write the IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) law, so I know what students' rights are and that parents must be included in making education decisions.

School closures brought a lot of things to light, but it seems that special education, particularly IEPs, have always been difficult to get. Why?

The Individual Education Plan is not just a simple accommodation that is handed out to anyone who wants it. One must document the need for an IEP through evaluations and observations, as well as by a committee decision. Another reason is that administrators see special needs students as dragging down scores. They also resent teachers' time being taken away for the meetings and the paperwork needed to document and comply with special

education regulations. In addition, the law is explicit about having a behavioral plan for children identified as autistic with which teachers must comply. These plans are meant to deal with disruptive behaviors, but take time and documentation to implement.

Is funding a factor?

Funding for special education comes from federal taxes not county taxes. The cost of accommodating a medically fragile child is absorbed by the federal government and in LCPS the number of medically fragile children is a small fraction of students. Also, specialists such as Occupational and Physical Therapists travel to schools as needed so it's not like there is a dedicated specialist for every school.

Special education is also known as exceptional education. We need to look at it as superior education and not special education. We need to look at the needs of the whole child and provide for those needs. And we need to do this for ALL our students.

It is also a myth that special education teachers are paid more than other teachers. All teachers are paid according to their education level and experience.

What do you think about teachers' unions and collective bargaining?

Collective bargaining is not necessary. It is just another way to control schools.

What is your most memorable experience?

I got involved in historic reenacting when I moved to Virginia. I joined the Living History Association, which is a program for re-enactors to volunteer in museums and other historical sites. It requires learning at several levels. You start as an indentured servant in a certain trade such as carpenter, gunsmith, farmer, seamstress, herbalist, etc. The lessons come from others who have progressed beyond the apprenticeship level and through personal original document research. You advance from apprentice to journeyman, master or grandmaster.

I became Martha Washington by studying her, her family, her community and her life for 25 years. My most memorable moment was when I was at Gatsby's Tavern for the 18th Century Birthnight Ball, where you must present in 1st person and behave and answer as if you actually are the person you portray. As Martha Washington I would visit with all the guests, thanking them for coming and answering questions. One of the visitors was a descendant of Martha's granddaughter. And we spoke of "my great-granddaughter, Columbia." As I was leaving that night, he came over and thanked me for making Martha come alive for him. He said he felt that she was really there at the ball with us. Before parting, he leaned forward, hugged me, and whispered in my ear "God bless you, Patsy." Not many people know that Patsy was Martha's nickname. I felt like he was reaching out through time to her through me, a precious moment to cherish.