



CANDIDATE SPOTLIGHT

JOE SMITH

SCHOOL BOARD - LITTLE RIVER DISTRICT

CANDIDATE: **JOE SMITH**

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What would you like voters to know about you?

First and foremost, I am a Christian, husband, and a father of four children. All of my children attended LCPS and our two daughters are still in high school. Because of that I am personally invested in their education. One of our sons is going to Virginia Tech and the other is attending the Coast Guard Academy. So, I am invested in LCPS and want to see it return to the system it once was.

I have also been coaching wrestling and softball teams for several years at the high school level. I am blessed to be in the athletes' lives as well as getting to know the other coaches and teachers and see what obstacles they currently face.

How long have you lived in Loudoun County and what do you like about it?

I am originally from Long Island, New York. It's a great place to grow up but we moved here in 2004 because Loudoun County is similar in that we have access to beaches, trails, rural areas, festivals, and wineries, but with less of the hustle and bustle of living near Manhattan. The close proximity to DC is also nice. We also liked the exceptional school system that was here at that time.

I also started my own prosthetics business making artificial limbs for local area hospitals and VA clinics. The success of my business is due to my ability to listen and collaborate with my patients and find the best solutions to help them overcome any obstacles or issues they face.

Why are you interested in running for school board?

I am not a politician; I see myself as more like a public servant. I want to bring back balance and common sense to our school system. I believe in civil discourse, democracy, and exchange of ideas for the best possible outcome. I have seen students and athletes for the past four years where gender equity and SEL curriculum were supposed to support relationships and promote academic excellence but actually did the opposite by causing division and fear among students and faculty. The time spent on this has taken away from focusing on the core curriculum and I can see how it has affected their grades and increased stress and anxiety.

Tanner Cross is a friend of mine and I saw first-hand how he was treated by the school board when he expressed his beliefs. The current school board has been an absolute disaster in that it has caused a culture of division and fear, especially if you don't align with their ideology.

Growing up in a family as one of eight children, my parents instilled in us that we were to mobilize and find solutions to solve problems. After a lot of prayer and discussion with my family, I decided that I wanted to do something about this. I would like to effect some change and see what I can do about these issues.

As a coach, what effects of the Covid school closures did you see?

Sports are important outlets that teach you to overcome obstacles and losses and be successful. As a coach I want to utilize sports to teach how it applies to life and relationships based on determination and dedication.

School closures created a huge void. Closing schools didn't give a pathway to maintain relationships or outlets to utilize and coaches were not included in any decision making to help formulate better solutions. The school board didn't provide any outline of how to move forward other than somehow keeping teams together. They also didn't recognize the importance of getting back to school sooner, especially for our most vulnerable student population like special education students who needed schools to open sooner. The school board dropped the ball on this by delaying reopening which made problems worse.

When we were finally allowed to return to sports, we were required to follow safety protocols and were allowed to play on a limited scale and schedule. The message we promoted was one of positivity and encouraged the students to appreciate sports even more and see it as a privilege to be on a team supporting one another. We made the best of a bad situation.

Have you run for or held public office before?

I have been the president of my community HOA. And I have also learned through sports as well as owning my own business how to be an effective leader of my teams through creating associations based on these relationships. I make sure I am listening and collaborating to find the best solutions.

What are the main issues you would like to see the school board address?

One main thing everyone is focusing on is bringing back academic excellence. From a business point of view, public schools are not putting out a good product anymore. We need to bring back a first-class education through our STEM programs and balance that with increased focus and funding for groups such as special education.

We also need to streamline budgets while striving to get politics and ideologies out of school. We have lost our main focus and what is our mission statement. We need to return to core subjects and academics and combine that with teacher support. I have spent a significant amount of time door knocking and having discussions with teachers. They have informed me that they are overwhelmed and under a lot of stress with incorporating SEL into the curriculum. Also there is an excessive amount of paperwork that is involved with this training. This further is reflected in academics because it is taking time away from teaching core subjects.

Virginia used to be at the top in academic categories and now we are at or near the bottom compared to other states. It's easy to blame school closures, but the focus on SEL and diversity has taken away from our core education. Most states are succeeding, and we are not because of this.

We also need school safety by working together with the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office to have trained School Resource Officers in every school. Illegal activities (guns, drugs, violence in the schools) should be handled by law enforcement. And we can keep issues separate so events that pertain to issues such as arguments between students or the dress code can be handled administratively. We need a culture where every student and teacher feels safe and secure.

We need better student discipline policies and holding students accountable. Stealing is a big problem in our schools and that needs to be addressed.

Any thoughts on the book controversy?

It is important to get the narrative across that we are not in favor of banning books, but we want age-appropriate books and materials in schools. We do not need graphic books at the elementary level. The federal government regulates age restrictions on movies, video games, buying alcohol etc. so why are school boards able to circumvent such regulations and guidance?

If these books need to be in schools, one solution is to have books available but with certain restrictions such as checking them out from the librarian with parental permission.

We also need more involvement in the selection process. Parents need to be a part of the process where everyone is informed through civil discourse and with full disclosure.

Who is your favorite historical or political figure?

I have several, but Ben Franklin is someone I admire. He was a scientist, author, ambassador, Founding Father, and inventor. He made an impact in so many areas that improved our way of life and made things better for our nation and around the world. He left the world a better place than he found it, and my goal even at a small level is to do something similar. I want to leave the school board better than the way I found it.