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## Hundreds gather for School Board Candidate Forum

By Sharon K. Sobotta



Candidates Katy Foreman, Dave Smith and Rob Sturm Photo Sharon K. Sobotta

A few hundred people gathered at Stanley Middle School on Oct. 3 hoping to learn the views of the six Lafayette School District board candidates. Unfortunately three of the six candidates declined to attend.

Martha Goralka, the League of Women Voters Service Co-chair and Forum organizer, said Robb McSorely never responded, Neils Larsen felt he'd been attacked and planned to suspend his campaign and Sarah Lind wavered on whether or not she'd come but declined in the end for fear that the event would be partisan and one-sided. "I'm disappointed that they felt that way. I think that if they had come, they would've had a chance to present their views," Goralka said. "We did have their name cards ready just in case any of them decided to come at the last minute. I am disappointed that they didn't."

While Anne Granlund, the president of the local chapter of the League of Women Voters, felt the forum went well, she also expressed regret for the no-shows. "When we say we're non-partisan, it means that we don't support any candidate and we invite all candidates to participate. I'm sorry some candidates felt otherwise, but we did invite them."

Throughout the evening, the three candidates in attendance, Katy Foreman, Dave Smith and Rob Sturm shared their perspectives on topics ranging from diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging and the banning of books to the ways in which DEIB and emotional support in schools helps or hinders student learning to the schools' roles in addressing the issue.

While there may have been slight nuances to the candidates responses, they were definitely aligned. All agree that DEIB and emotional support are cornerstones of education, that no books need to be taken off of shelves (trusting librarians to make those decisions), and that schools do have a part to play in promoting sustainability. In terms of the schools' pandemic response, the consensus was that although the district did the best it could at the time while following the data, the science and the feedback of families, lessons can always be learned in hindsight and protocols can always be improved upon.

When asked about whether students are distracted by anti-racist and social emotional learning, Smith said this type of instruction provides a set of tools to survive and thrive in the community. "One thing we focused on was learning loss during the pandemic," he said. "We've rebounded a bit and are on our way to full recovery. Social and emotional learning helps support [students] to move forward." Sturm said, respectively, that this question involves a false assumption and when you see it through a different lens, this year's CAP scores are the highest since the pandemic. Foreman agreed with both speakers, and said that social emotional learning is critical to education. "We've seen a high increase in suicides," she said. "I don't see this as a distraction at all."

Many audience members expressed disappointment that Larsen, McSorely and Lind didn't show up. As for those who attended the forum (as well as those who didn't make it), hoping to learn the full spectrum of perspectives from the six candidates, Goralka said there's still hope. "They can visit votersedge.org and see the top three issues of any (and all of) the candidates. Your vote is your voice. Vote the way that feels right to you. It's not about how your neighbors or others feel. It's about how you feel."

The consensus among the candidates who did show up was that they wished their counterparts were sitting at the table beside them so that they could have had an opportunity to debate with each other and so that voters could have learned about the breadth of perspectives.

"I'm both a candidate and a voter and I would've appreciated an opportunity to hear the full range of views on a full range of issues," Sturm said.

"The fact that we had a full gym shows that the community is thirsting for an actual conversation where we can present ideas," Smith said. "I appreciate that the League of Women Voters, a non-partisan organization, organizes these types of forums. I know there'll be six candidates on the ballot and I hope the candidates who showed up tonight were able to answer some of the questions of people in the audience and hopefully we'll earn some of their votes."

Foreman contrasted the experience of the public forum to the Lafayette Education Association Teachers Forum when all six candidates showed up. "I appreciated that time to hear from the other candidates and

have an event where there was a contrast," she said. "The event with all six of us was more comprehensive. Teachers got a picture of who all six of us were," adding that it was disappointing to not have that replicated for the general public at the Oct. 3 forum. Foreman plans to attend the Oct. 13 Lafayette Homeowners Council forum at 7 p.m. on Zoom (<https://lafayettehomeownerscouncil.org/>). "I want to share my message with as many people as possible," Foreman said, "and I want to answer the questions of voters."

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