



# BIZVOTES RESPONSES

INFORMING THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY AND ENCOURAGING  
POLITICAL AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT.



Incumbents' names are listed in blue.

## ALGONKIAN

### 1. Please provide an overview of your background including your credentials and areas of expertise you intend to exercise if elected to the Loudoun County School Board?

#### **JOHN STEVENS**

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I am the current Potomac District representative and Chairman of the School Board. I have served on the Board since February 2007, and in a leadership position for the majority of that time. Prior to serving on the School Board I have served Loudoun on the Housing Advisory Board, Social Services Board, Community Criminal Justice Board, Countryside PTA and Broad Run Farms Civic Association. I am a former small business owner and Loudoun Chamber member.

I have five children attending six different LCPS schools (one attends both Potomac Falls HS and Monroe Technology Center).

#### **DEBBI ROSE**

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I currently work part-time as an Intellectual Property Fellow for the Association for Competitive Technology. Prior to that, I was the Senior Legislative Counsel for the Entertainment Software Association and a Counsel to the Committee on the Judiciary of the U.S. House of Representatives. This experience has given me the skills to bring interested parties together, analyze information, build consensus, develop recommendations and strategy, and implement solutions. These skills are necessary to successfully represent parents and taxpayers as a Member of the Loudoun County School Board.

#### **JOSEPH GUZMAN**

josephguzman.com

#### **EILEEN TAGG-MURDOCK**

- Served as a VA licensed English teacher for Loudoun County Public Schools (LCPS)
- Served five years as a substitute teacher for LCPS
- Served as highly active parent-volunteer in LCPS classrooms for nearly ten years
- Earned a master's degree in English with an emphasis in teaching reading and writing
- Co-founder of the Loudoun School Discipline Reform Initiative
- Expert on Education Law
- Expert on School Board Policies and Bylaws
- Upbeat citizen advocate



**2. How would you rate the performance of the current school board? In what areas has the current school board excelled and what areas must be improved?**

**JOHN STEVENS**

I am very proud that my colleagues have learned about district operations, resisted micro-management, responded to constituent requests and engaged in congenial debate, even about issues such as budget cuts and changing boundaries. We have resisted special interest pressures and have not created ideological camps. Our members are active in the schools and in other parts of the community.

The next Board must set specific, measurable, attainable and time-specific goals to formulate its budget, guide its agendas, evaluate the Superintendent, and be held accountable to the public.

**DEBBI ROSE**

I would rate the performance of the current school board as fair to poor. The school board has not done a good job of providing parents, taxpayers, teachers and the business community with opportunities to have meaningful input on issues, making the process open and transparent, providing critical analysis of the administration's budget proposals, or developing long-range plans for student growth. There needs to be major improvement in these areas.

**JOSEPH GUZMAN**

**EILEEN TAGG-MURDOCK**

I know many will not agree with me, but I would rate the performance of the current school board as very low. The current school board routinely violates the Code of Virginia and does not always honor its own school board policies. This sets up a negative and hostile environment for students, teachers, and the entire community. The school board must be trusted to obey its legal and professional duties and should be held accountable when it fails to live up to its statutory and public responsibilities. Absolute compliance with the letter of the law would be a big school board improvement.



**3. How would you rate the performance of the LCPS Administration? In what areas has the current school board excelled and what areas must be improved?**

**JOHN STEVENS**

The LCPS administration is highly regarded throughout Virginia and the nation. Many administrators hold leadership positions in state and national organizations in their fields, and Loudoun receives frequent recognition for excellence in instruction, energy conservation and operational efficiency.

The Administration's biggest opportunity for improvement independent of the Board's guidance is to be more responsive to the Loudoun community's extraordinary willingness and ability to partner with LCPS in many ways.

**DEBBI ROSE**

I would rate the performance of the LCPS Administration as poor. It does not offer stakeholders with meaningful opportunities to have input on curriculum, personnel, or budget issues. It does not provide transparent and easy to understand budget proposals. It does not provide cost/benefit data on the effectiveness of programs in educating students. And, it continually uses teachers as pawns in a game to get support for its budget. Much of the student success in LCPS is a result of great teachers and dedicated parents, not the school board or the administration.

**JOSEPH GUZMAN**

**EILEEN TAGG-MURDOCK**

I would also rate the performance of the LCPS Administration as low. The current LCPS Administration excels at spin control and media manipulation, and would have the community believe students and teachers come first. However, this is not the reality actually reflected within LCPS. As a teacher who served in the trenches and on the front-lines of education, I have witnessed a great deal of mediocrity, waste, and injustice perpetrated by the LCPS Administration. The superintendent performs beautifully as a "show" horse, but we need a humble "work" horse committed to true excellence.



**4. What do you feel is the most important or critical issue facing Loudoun's K-12 educational system? Why do you feel this way and what would you do as a member of the School Board to address this issue?**

**JOHN STEVENS**

Loudoun's greatest challenge is its continuing enrollment growth, and the most critical issue is the lack of an enrollment plan for the thousands of students for whom we will not have seats in a few years. As Chairman I have instructed the Superintendent to present the next Board with a proposed enrollment plan in January showing options to address those shortcomings within the limitations of our construction budget. Charter schools, altered school calendars and schedules, distance learning, open enrollment, temporary classrooms and more will likely all need to be a part of that plan.

**DEBBI ROSE**

One of the more critical issues facing the LCPS is the growth in student population and the associated costs to accommodate the students. This issue is being raised by all the stakeholders. In talking to parents, I constantly hear concerns about student/teacher ratios. In developing a strategic plan to address this issue, I will do my best to make the process transparent, involve the community earlier, and carefully consider all options to handle enrollment fluctuations.

**JOSEPH GUZMAN**

**EILEEN TAGG-MURDOCK**

The biggest issue facing LCPS is an urgent, fundamental push to get back to basics. Students need a strong grasp of rudimentary reading, writing, and math skills. NOVA Community colleges have made huge expenditures on special math labs and developmental writing/reading centers due to the failures of LCPS to give students a strong foundation in these core areas. Making sure students receive excellent training in core competencies so they are prepared and ready to compete in the global marketplace is a huge priority for me.



**5. Do you feel the working relationship between the Board of Supervisors and the School Board is effective and well structured? Why or why not? If not, please provide your recommendations to improve this relationship?**

**JOHN STEVENS**

The working relationship between the two Boards is terrible. It is marked by unnecessary personal affronts and power grabs. Supervisors have a culture of micromanagement that conflicts with the School Board's culture, and act out of frustration with the lack of line-item control over schools that they enjoy with County departments.

I hope that the next Board of Supervisors leaves school operations to the School Board, adopts a culture of strategic-level corporate leadership and civility, and can set budgetary limits without attacking each other, County staff, LCPS and the School Board.

**DEBBI ROSE**

The current working relationship between the two Boards is not effective. It has appeared to be a power struggle between the two bodies for control of 70% of the county budget. This relationship can be improved if the two bodies focus on the mission of providing an excellent education on a transparent and responsible budget. Specifically, the school board must first critically review the budget, propose a good-faith budget, and give back surplus funds at the end of the fiscal year. The Superintendant must stop claiming that teacher cuts will be necessary if the budget isn't fully funded.

**JOSEPH GUZMAN**

**EILEEN TAGG-MURDOCK**

The relationship between the School Board and the BOS is often strained and not well-structured. More effort needs to be made to better communicate and share information between the two boards. Advanced planning and long range consideration of budget issues would facilitate a strong working relationship instead of the frequent knee-jerk responses we see made in reaction to budget concerns. There should be no surprises when it comes to budget requests. The two boards should cultivate a spirit of cooperation, consensus, and connection throughout the year, not just at budget time.





**6. How can the Board of Supervisors and School Board work collectively to streamline the school site selection process and associated land use approvals?**

**JOHN STEVENS**

The School Board needs to adopt open-enrollment policies that will allow us to build facilities without the full complement of athletic facilities and to take advantage of existing underused commercial structures. Loudoun County is the only county in Virginia requiring the Special Exception process for public facilities. This adds several months and millions of dollars to the process at a time when we have little time, few willing sellers and not enough funds. The BoS needs to remove the special exception requirement to save funds and time, and needs to stop micromanaging land acquisition.

**DEBBI ROSE**

It is important that this process be as open and transparent to all stakeholders as possible. Currently the process appears veiled from public review, debate or scrutiny. The appearance of impropriety should be avoided at all cost. I look forward to learning more about how the school board and administration select school property sites and finding ways to publicize and streamline the process. The community needs to be involved earlier in order to identify and resolve problems at the outset, rather than ending the process in heated disputes.

**JOSEPH GUZMAN**

**EILEEN TAGG-MURDOCK**

Seeking community input is key to a smooth, streamlined school site selection process. All BOS and School Board members must be incredibly mindful of their role and duty as public servants first. Many problems with site selection crop up as a result of public outcry over dissatisfaction with school sites and boundaries. These setbacks could be alleviated by seeking community feedback at the start of the process rather than at the end when important decisions have already been made without the approval of the constituency. The wants and needs of the community should always come first.

7. Please provide your thoughts on the following potential approaches to supplement traditional education funding, and for those your support, how each approach could be incorporated into Loudoun Public School's budget and operating system?
- School-Business Partnerships;
  - Public charter and magnet schools;
  - Open enrollment to balance population amount schools;
  - Distance-learning for in-school and home-schooled students;
  - Adjustments to class sizes; and/or
  - Other approaches that may compliment the education today's Loudoun County children are receiving through LCPS.

**JOHN STEVENS**

School-Business Partnerships are already a critical component to enriching the experience of LCPS students and the professional development of LCPS educators. We must expand and encourage more, especially district-wide business partners.

I have worked to encourage public charter and magnet schools and I hope to see charter school applications soon because they can offer increased enrollment without adding to our capital costs. They will offer our first look at public school choice (open enrollment), which is about so much more than balancing enrollment because as very few schools have significant capacity.

Distance-learning will be a major component of meeting our enrollment challenge, and the LCPS capacity to offer it is increasing. I'd like to point out that we need to break down the "in-school" vs. "home-school" wall. We need to recognize that some kids will get 100% of their education from a public school and some will get 0%, but most will get some percentage in between, and only by getting rid of the "in or out" mentality can we manage enrollment and serve all students.

Loudoun's parents feel very strongly that class sizes must not be further increased.



## DEBBI ROSE

- School-Business partnerships should be encouraged and supported. Local business partners should financially support these initiatives because it will better prepare students to enter the local workforce.
- Public charter and magnet schools should be encouraged. I support giving parents a wide range of educational choices. Charter schools should be required to meet certain standards and self-fund as much as possible.
- Open enrollment—I look forward to learning more about the need for this in LCPS. Again, parental choice is an important element to this issue.
- Distance-learning should be an option when traditional educational approaches are not effective. Utilizing existing technologies available in the school and in the home should reduce costs. A one-size-fits-all distance learning system may not be necessary. Home-schooling should be a welcomed option for parents that chose to do it. There should be regular testing to ensure standards are met. These students should be able to participate in public school extracurricular activities.
- Low class size is optimal. The current standards seem to strike the right balance of class size and teacher capability.

## JOSEPH GUZMAN

## EILEEN TAGG-MURDOCK

I am greatly in favor of cultivating stronger school-business ties and partnerships, not just in the area of school funding but also in the development of school curriculum as well. I would like to see more real-world connections made between education and business so students can grasp how a commitment to education and training translates into clear career options and professional growth opportunities. I need to further investigate the benefit and impact of charter and magnet schools as well as open enrollment to give an informed and thoughtful answer on these alternative learning arenas. I would also like to seek further input from the community with regard to these options. As a candidate seeking public office, it is important to keep my finger on the pulse of my constituents wishes and then act accordingly. I am in favor of distance-learning as a supplement to traditional hands-on education, but not as a substitute for face-to-face teacher/student interaction. I believe in leveraging available technologies to help students reach their full academic potential so they may achieve maximum success in and out of the classroom.



**8. How can Loudoun County Public Schools best improve either its curriculum or career training to ensure its students meet the requirements of the future workplace?**

**JOHN STEVENS**

LCPS' first priority must be to meet the federal and state government requirements for instruction; those requirements must change to better align with the future workplace. Within those restrictions LCPS increasingly emphasizes communication, collaboration and critical thinking as key skills for a 21st-century workforce. We must encourage STEM and foreign language skills. Implementing public school choice along with curriculum differentiation between schools and classrooms will further encourage innovation and the ability to meet the strengths and needs of individual students.

**DEBBI ROSE**

Teachers, educators, and parents must collaborate on the effectiveness of the curriculum. I will work to bring these groups together to develop recommendations to improve the curriculum so that all students will reach their full potential. Career training requires partnering with the business community and government entities. LCPS should develop and implement a robust internship program. Business leaders should teach courses and be a part of curriculum development. This will prepare students to be competitive in the future workplace.

**JOSEPH GUZMAN**

**EILEEN TAGG-MURDOCK**

Again, as I mentioned earlier, we need to get back to basics. Emphasis on core competencies such as reading, writing, and math must come first. All learning builds and springs forth from these three basic starting points. Today's aggressive and rampant focus on test scores alone often undermines the true goals of education. To be effective, education must be holistic and cumulative, not fragmented and piecemeal. The trend now is to "teach to the test" above all else. However, this approach may actually stymie the acquisition of learning and may reduce retention of needed core skills.



**9. What economies of scale or other creative efficiencies should the School Board initiate to reduce the cost of education per student while maintaining the highest level of educational experience for our K-12 students?**

**JOHN STEVENS**

Studies by the Center for American Progress, Forbes and a 2008 management audit show that LCPS is one of the most efficient school systems anywhere in the US. LCPS is consistently in the top two districts in northern Virginia for ratios of school-based personnel, and spends just 2.2% of its budget on administration. Economies of scale at LCPS have already been achieved. While public school choice, charter schools and compensation reforms will further focus funds in the classroom, I will not advocate for a lower cost per pupil as we are already lower than all but one district in the DC region.

**DEBBI ROSE**

The LCPS should attempt to reduce costs by maximizing services through single vendors. Technology services and products can and should be used where effective. The school board should be engaged in learning more about how new technologies can benefit students and lower personnel and operating costs. Huge technology purchases might offer some initial cost savings, however, there needs to be a long-term cost/ benefit analysis done to demonstrate that the educational benefits are measurable and outweigh the cost of maintaining the technology.

**JOSEPH GUZMAN**

**EILEEN TAGG-MURDOCK**

Sometimes I think there is an inverted relationship between how much is spent per child and the actual quality of education each child receives. D.C. Public Schools is a great example of this. The problem is the "cost of education per student" does not necessarily measure the services the child receives in the classroom. I think there is a lot of waste in the current LCPS budget. That's one of the reasons why I wish to serve on the board. I want greater accountability and transparency. I want to know precisely how that \$700 million is spent, not just on paper but in action.



**10. Do you see any areas where LCPS and County functions may be pursued collaboratively to better leverage available services and resources?**

**JOHN STEVENS**

LCPS and the County already have a number of combined functions in fields as diverse as technology, transportation, benefits and payroll. We build co-located facilities, LCPS fields are used by Parks & Rec.

Truly collaborative action requires mutual respect and focus on areas of mutual responsibility, land acquisition being the biggest of those.

As LCPS has a much greater scale of operation than the County Government, the School Board is always happy to consider proposals to take responsibility for combined areas of operation that the County isn't able to conduct efficiently on its own.

**DEBBI ROSE**

Yes, LCPS can and should collaborate with the county government to educate and prepare students for careers in business and public service. Students should be given the opportunity to do internships in all the departments of the county government: Board of Supervisors, fire department and sheriffs office, social services, zoning boards, revenue department and the courts. These opportunities will educate students about the important role of local government and how it interacts with citizens and businesses. Also, students can start getting specialized training in a chosen career.

**JOSEPH GUZMAN**

**EILEEN TAGG-MURDOCK**

I think there are probably many areas in which LCPS could work closely with the County for the greater good of our public school system, and I will explore and pursue each and every one of these possibilities as an elected school official. I will do this by being well-informed and well-educated on all issues facing the school system. I will also remain open to new ideas and accessible to anyone in the community who has suggestions, feedback, or insights on how to best leverage available services and resources.



**11. Why are you a candidate for the School Board? What differentiates you from your opponent(s)?**

**JOHN STEVENS**

I chose to run for re-election to the School Board because I believe that school system governance is at least as important as the work done by elected positions with greater pay and prestige and needs to be led by experienced people with a strong understanding of the schools and community. The School Board is not a “senior PTA,” it is the corporate Board for a billion-dollar organization.

I will provide leadership to a new School Board committed to setting specific, measurable, attainable and time-specific goals and implementing greater direction and accountability for LCPS.

**DEBBI ROSE**

I am running for the School Board because I am a parent who cares about public education, a taxpayer who cares about how my money is being spent and a resident of Loudoun County who cares about the community in which I live. With 70% of the county budget appropriated to LCPS, it is imperative that those funds be used to effectively and efficiently provide our students with an excellent education. Higher spending does not equate to a better education. Unlike my opponent, I will challenge the effectiveness of programs, cut administrative costs, involve parents, and reward good teachers.

**JOSEPH GUZMAN**

**EILEEN TAGG-MURDOCK**

I want to ensure the school board effectively and responsibly meets the needs of students, teachers, and the community. I also want to improve communication between the public and the school board. Greater responsiveness and Increased transparency on the part of the school board would go a long way in restoring the public trust. Furthermore, I am the only candidate from the Algonkian District who has worked as a teacher for LCPS. Consequently, I bring a unique set of skills and qualifications to the position, and I possess great passion for and belief in the power of education.





**12. Do you have a web site where more information about you is available? If so, what is that web site address and can this be provided to our membership?**

**JOHN STEVENS**

Website: [StevensForSchools.org](http://StevensForSchools.org)  
Twitter; @Stevens4Schools, @LoudounSchools  
Blog: [blog.LoudounSchools.org](http://blog.LoudounSchools.org)  
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