

Candidates address citizens at Dale District forum

By Donna C. Gregory
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As a sparse crowd of about 30 people looked on, the five candidates running for the Dale District School Board seat answered questions about the most pressing issues in Chesterfield County schools during a Candidates Forum at Meadowbrook High School last week. Co-sponsored by the Chesterfield County Council of PTAs/PTSAs, the Chesterfield County Chamber of Commerce, the Responsible Growth Alliance of Chesterfield and the Meadowbrook Community Council, panelists from each of these groups and others asked candidates a series of questions on topics such as overcrowded classrooms, the possibility of a 12-month school year and increasing funding for educational initiatives.

Each candidate was given a list of the questions prior to the event, and forum rules prevented much interaction between the candidates.

The questioning began with an inquiry about how each candidate planned to address the large number of trailers being used as classrooms at county schools. David Wyman, who has been endorsed by the Chesterfield Republican Party, said his prior work experience as an international financial executive with Texas Instruments and Invensys means he's comfortable dealing with capacity issues.

But, he said since the school system is adding about 1,000 new students each year, Chesterfield County Public Schools' current plan to build four new elementary and middle schools in the Bermuda and Matoaca districts "will afford us limited gain."

Candidate Jim Holland, a certified public accountant and adjunct professor with Virginia Commonwealth University and J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College,

said he'd address overcrowding in three ways: by redistricting, building additions on existing schools and constructing new schools.

"We know we are growing, but that should not be an excuse," added candidate Janet Stephens, who works as a teacher with Richmond City Public Schools.

Candidates applauded the recent redistricting effort for elementary schools in the Bermuda District, saying they felt the School Board had done a good job involving the public in the process.

The placement of new schools and redistricting can sometimes become marred in politics, admitted some candidates. "Political parties should get out of the school system,"

said candidate Arthur Maxwell, Jr., who is retired from the military and owns a real estate company with his wife.

Candidates were less specific on how to secure funding for schools, since the school system is dependent on the Chesterfield Board of Supervisors and state and federal sources to fund educational initiatives.

Wyman said the School Board must work closely with the Board of Supervisors and the superintendent.

"You've got to go to all sources," said Holland, adding that he'd work with both state and federal legislators and agencies to bring in additional funding for schools.

"We need to not only ask, but insist," said Stephens.

The responses of all five candidates were tepid when asked about extending the school year to 12-months. Wyman said the community hasn't been supportive of year-round school plans in the past due to vacations and other summertime endeavors.

"I believe in the benefits, but if I can't convince my wife of the change, then I doubt I can convince the community," he said.

Verena McCall, who is currently filling the Dale District seat as an interim School Board member until the election on Nov. 7, agreed with Wyman. "It's not going to be one of the initiatives we can sell to our county at this time," she said.

All candidates said they were in favor of tweaking school start times for elementary and high school students. Studies have shown high school students perform better when they start classes later in the morning while elementary school students show improvements when they begin earlier. Holland proposes studying the issue further while Maxwell said, "It's about time we do it."

"We have to do what's best for our children," agreed McCall.

When asked about the role of the School Board in supporting teachers in the classroom, Maxwell said, "We should have a No Teacher Left Behind program like the No Child Left Behind Program. I believe in good pay for teachers. You pay for what you get and if you pay low, that's what you'll get."

Stephens agreed, "Our teachers need to be rewarded for what they do."

When asked what are the greatest challenges facing the school system, every candidate mentioned school safety. Other common responses included school overcrowding and teacher retention. Stephens said Chesterfield teachers are some of the lowest paid in the Richmond metro. "There are quite a few [teachers] who came to Richmond, because of Chesterfield's salaries," she said.

After the panelists finished asking their round of questions, the public was invited to address the candidates. Matoaca resident Bob Herndon asked the candidates how they felt about student clubs related to sexual orientation such as the Gay Straight Alliance.

"It's an emotional issue," responded Wyman, "but I think the answer is simple: All clubs need to conform to county policy."

"We are legally bound to allow certain clubs even if we don't agree with their purpose," said McCall.

"If you have it for one, you must have it for the other," added Maxwell.

Dale District residents will head to the polls to select their new School Board member on Nov. 7. The winner will take office immediately, serving the remainder of a term left vacant by former School Board member Elizabeth Davis, who passed away in June.



Wyman



McCall



Holland



Stephens



Maxwell

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When the body begins to experience abnormal functions like asthma, allergies, chronic pain, fatigue or lowered immunity, we must first be suspicious of some kind of nerve system interruption. The problem is this: You weren't taught to think that way.

If Your Spine was on Your Face, You'd Take Better Care of It!...

I saw this on a marquee several years ago, and it really made sense. The dental profession has done such a great job teaching us that, if we don't maintain proper dental hygiene, it can lead to gingivitis, cavities and worse. That's why most people you know brush and floss their teeth every day and have regularly scheduled visits with their dentist. But, while poor dental hygiene might leave you with a set of false teeth, it won't kill you.

On the other hand, your spine and nervous system are a completely different story.

You can't replace either one of them.

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Get the Big Idea and All Else Follows

If your body is not well and you dump medication into it, your body is now both sick and poisoned. Reaching for the medicine cabinet is just a bad habit. Fortunately, it is also becoming obsolete behavior for a growing number of families. The big idea is simple, which is why it's so big! Your brain runs your whole body and communicates its "wellness messages" through the nerve system. If stress interrupts or "traps" nerve supply, your body will experience some kind of shutdown. We have found that, a vast majority of the time, the nerve system is interrupted as a result of spinal column misalignment. Through a series of safe, gentle and painless adjustments, the full power of the nerve system is restored, generating extraordinary healing capabilities within the body. The power that made your body heal your body it doesn't happen any other way.

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