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Three U46 board candidates at forum say they support staff, teachers being armed in schools

By: Rafael Guerrero



School board candidates running for the School District U46 school board talked school safety, spending, career pathways and other topics Thursday at a forum held by the Citizen's Advisory Council.

Two District U46 School Board candidates said they support teachers and staff being armed in schools and a third said he believes every school district should decide for themselves.

The candidates voiced their opinions on the issue and others Thursday during a forum held by Citizen's Advisory Council. Seven of the eight candidates participated in the event, held at the district's administrative building in Elgin. They are vying to fill four four-year board terms on April 2.

"The fact is guns in the hands of good people are a deterrent to evil," said incumbent board member Jeanette Ward, who is seeking a second term. "If a school only has a (school resource officer), all the criminal needs to know is take out the one person."

The issue was a hot button topic this fall, when school boards across the state had to decide if they would support the Illinois Association of School Boards pursuing legislation in which districts would be allowed to have armed teachers and staff for safety reasons. Downstate schools were pushing for the measure because many don't have resource police officers in their buildings, unlike many suburban and Chicago schools, and it can take time for a police officer to get to a school.



Jeanette Ward

Candidate Ina Silva-Sobolewski agreed with Ward on the gun issue.

Silva-Sobolewski said there was a school shooting recently in her hometown of Sao Paolo, Brazil. Two gunmen killed eight people at the school, where no one was armed and it took authorities several minutes to arrive, she said.

“I will let you decide if you think those teachers should be trained or should have had a gun,” she said.

Candidate Daniel Hancock said he wasn’t opposed to arming school staff, but it should be up to each school district to decide. He saw the value teachers having guns in rural schools that may not have armed police officers but said he was uncertain of having such a policy in U46.

Incumbent Sue Kerr, appointed board member John Devereux and challengers Eva Porter and Kate Thommes did not agree. Candidate Tina Rio did not attend the forum.

Devereux, who is seeking his first four-year term, said no teacher could be as ready for a gun attack as a professional law enforcement officer.

“There’s no way that teachers could get the training — the lifelong, situational, in-depth training that police officers get,” he said.



John Devereux

Thommes, an Elgin resident and Elgin Community College instructor, was more blunt: “No guns in schools.” Porter, a retired teacher, said she attended college to become an educator, not an armed officer. If someone in a school is armed, it should be a police officer or security guard, she said.

“I think there are so many issues involved here,” Kerr said. “If a teacher is armed and there is an armed intruder alert, is the teacher supposed to leave his or her classroom and run out looking for the intruder? If the teacher does leave and the police arrive, how does the police know if it’s the teacher or the intruder who is running around?”

The candidates were also divided on the issue of the district budget, which exceeds \$500 million. Ward and Silva-Sobolewski supported a freeze or reduction in district spending to help taxpayers, especially as U46’s enrollment continues to decline.

Hancock wrote in a questionnaire passed out to Thursday’s forum attendees he wants to see “students receive the best possible education at a minimum cost to taxpayers.”

Devereux acknowledged that U46 property taxes were high, but he said it is a symptom of inadequate education funding from the state.

Some candidates support the expansion of programs like trauma-informed care and preschool because it funds U46 services vital to address achievement gaps, student discipline, and other needs. Kerr said “it may cost money” to operate such services and programs.



Ina Silva-Sobolewski

Thommes said “students need to come first” in the district’s priorities over teachers and taxpayers, though she said the latter two were also priorities.

“I believe taxpayers do understand that a large portion of their tax dollars goes toward education funding,” said Porter, a retired educator and Hanover Park resident.

“When we talk about tax dollars, we have to understand that is a part of the educational process,” she said. “When the state gives more money, then we don’t have to depend as much on property taxes.”

Candidates unanimously agreed on U46’s plan to create career-based educational pathways in the high schools and to expand and convert the current academies into magnet programs. The changes are to start in 2021-22.

“I believe this is one thing U46 is doing well,” said Ward, of West Chicago. “I appreciate that pathways (are) preparing students for college or a career right after high school.”

Many of the candidates said they saw the pathways approach as particularly beneficial to students who may not attend a college or university after high school. The program will have tracks for those planning on higher education, like accounting and engineering, as well as for those want to go into a trade, such as welding or auto repair.

“I think the first thing we have to do is stop treating a four-year degree as the best choice,” Thommes said. “We have to remember that anything that brings you a family-sustaining wage, a life-sustaining wage, is a good thing.”

The candidates said they were awaiting more information on such things as transportation costs, middle school involvement and student guidance counseling.

“I agree with some of the comments that the career pathways will be one of the biggest challenges (U46 faces in the next four years),” said Kerr, a Bartlett resident running for a second term. “But I think an even bigger challenge is getting those kids from K-8 ready for high school, ready for those pathways.”



Kate Thommes



Sue Kerr



Eva Porter



Daniel Hancock

SPORTS

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Boys volleyball: Bartlett sweeps Geneva in opener

By: Kevin McGavin

There were two defining offensive moments for the Bartlett boys volleyball in its two-set victory over Geneva to start the season at home on Monday evening.

Matt Tomasek had back-to-back kills for the Hawks after Marty Radomski started a sequence of five straight offensive points with an ace.

The second Tomasek kill completed a 10-2 run that truly evaporated the Vikings' early 3-point lead in the second set.

Bartlett was more on its way, however, to a 25-13, 25-16 straight-sets victory over the Vikings when team conductor Carter Burzlaff had half of his match-high 4 aces in succession to give the Hawks a comfortable late 8-point lead in Game 2.

It was total dominance by Bartlett in the schools' opener as Radomski registered 2 more kills with his match-best 10 winners than Geneva could muster as a team.

"We were pushing ourselves to get better on every single point," said Burzlaff, who ended the match with a kill. "I think we have a really good chance to go far this year. We always come together when the school season comes around."

In the match-clinching set, James Ballance had the last of the Hawks' 6 kills to give the team a 23-13 cushion.

Serve-receive was a fundamental difference in the match as Bartlett libero Sohum Desai served five straight points as part of a 6-0 run that Geneva never recovered from in the first set.

Geneva (0-1) was clearly suffering from first-match jitters during the spurt that gave Bartlett a 9-3 lead as the team had multiple service errors and technical violations in the opening game.

"In the second game I thought we did a much better job of not making those silly mistakes," Geneva coach Stephanie Rasmussen said.

The Hawks' Radomski made sure Geneva would never find its rhythm offensively in the opening set.

One of 10 seniors on the Hawks' 11-man roster, Radomski had 5 kills in each of the two sets, including game point in the first game.

"I am really grateful to have such great teammates," Radomski said. "It's real easy to play when your teammates are fantastic. We have been playing together for a long time. No one had any jitters. We came out firing, ready to go."

Bartlett (1-0) had other weapons to rely on as well.

Toiyon Walton had 3 of his 4 kills during a second-set-separating sequence for Bartlett.

Will Johnson had 4 kills to pace Geneva.

"We have a lot of kids playing different positions," Rasmussen said. "On the bright side we can only go up from here."