

# The Columbus Dispatch Voter's Guide

## Candidate Questionnaire – Westerville Board of Education

### Candidate: Luke Davis



**Education:** BA, Political Science, Ohio Dominican University.

**Experience:** Project management experience from \$50M to \$300MM. Program development for root cause analysis, process controls, and Corrective / Preventive Action (CAPA). Talent for building teams, training programs, and motivating to achieve goals.

**Family:** Married for 19 years, Father of 2 children in the District.

**Campaign Website:** [www.forResponsibleChange.com](http://www.forResponsibleChange.com)

**The fate of the magnet schools has been a point of debate for the district for the past few years. The program was cut nearly two years ago but continues to operate in a pared-down form. What should become of the program and the aging buildings that housed it?**

The magnet program should be fully restored and expanded.

Westerville's magnet program was rated best in Franklin County by the Ohio Department of Education, and the parents and students involved seemed to be exceptionally happy with it. This kind of offering is the reason a school district exists! The school board's decision to cut this program is a classic example of why "Students First" management as proposed by Jim Burgess, John Sodt and me should be put into effect. If the board sets priorities with students, parents and taxpayers in mind, effective offerings such as this one get high priority.

**With 40 percent of college-bound Ohio students needing remedial coursework, how can the school board work to better ensure that Westerville graduates are fully prepared for college or careers?**

A remedial rate at this level is completely unacceptable. The district has put itself in a precarious position by putting so much emphasis on "teaching to the test." Somewhere along the line, the concept of teaching students to think and reason was lost. For years, educators in Westerville and in other venues have been clear that "teaching to the test" will bring inferior educational results. Jim Burgess, John Sodt and I agree with those professionals. It is our intention to eliminate this practice and to free our educators to provide our students with the best educational product they know how to produce.

A responsible school board cannot be lax in its role of holding the district's administrators and educators accountable for providing an optimal educational experience. Neither can it ignore its own obligation to provide those administrators and educators with the freedom to work to their highest potential to achieve it.

## **What can be done to strengthen the middle-school program?**

As the father of two daughters ages 9 and 12, this question is particularly important to me. Our middle schools are strong in the subjects they teach, but the limited curriculum penalizes the student who seeks to excel. Once again, a Students First approach is required to prioritize correctly. We need to install a full range of courses comparable to other Central Ohio school districts so our students will have a strong foundation upon which to build for high school, and to compete at the college/career levels.

The mission statement of the Westerville City School District tells us, "Our mission is to prepare students to contribute to the competitive and changing world in which we live." Raising the level of academic offerings to meet those of other districts is a good first step toward that aim.

## **What program areas do you believe the district should focus on, and how can they be improved?**

First priority should go to the basics upon which all else will build. Reading, writing, math and technology are indispensable. No student will be successful without strong foundations in these areas, either in school or in life.

For students who aspire to higher learning, we need more honors, accelerated and advanced placement offerings than we have at present. I think we have limited those students who are capable of excelling. As a parent recently told me, "Accelerated classes are where the action is!"

For students who wish to pursue careers following high school, we should work to restore our relationships with Central Ohio businesses which employ our graduates. We must understand their needs and how best to prepare our students to fill them. I would like to reinvigorate the Adopt-a-School program begun about thirty years ago to develop those ties. Currently, the district's website features its 2008-2009 Adopt-a-School partners! Our schools are missing a significant opportunity.

## **How do you assess the district's financial position? What can be done to improve it?**

Passage of the last tax levy has put the district in excellent financial condition. This is a golden opportunity to begin implementing the kind of spending policies and cost controls that Jim Burgess, John Sodt and I have encountered in our private-sector careers.

Our Students First management plan calls for zero-based budgeting which requires us to start from scratch and look at needs through the eyes of the students, parents and taxpayers of the school district. Those items directly linked to a student's daily educational experience get top priority. Everything else falls to a lower priority ranking.

The current five-year forecast shows deficit projections about three years into the latest levy period. We believe the available money should last much longer without a new levy. To learn more about how we can stretch your tax dollars farther, please visit us at [www.ForResponsibleChange.com](http://www.ForResponsibleChange.com).

## **What steps do you believe the board can take to engage the community and heal community rifts?**

It is the Board of Education's leadership that is necessary to heal those rifts. The "us versus them" attitude that has pervaded this district for years desperately needs to change. Everyone's views must be respected. If you support passage of a tax levy, you shouldn't be branded as insensitive to the poor and elderly. If you oppose one, you shouldn't be cast as a Scrooge who hates teachers, schools and your own children. If you have a good idea for change, you should get a hearing based on the quality of the idea, not the "camp" from which you're perceived to come. If you're a parent with a question or an issue, you shouldn't be treated as a chronic complainer.

When a more respectful attitude is displayed by the Board of Education itself, it can be demanded of administrators and all other employees. The current practice of delegating community relations to a "community engagement committee" simply ignores the issue and passes the buck away from the school board. Those on the school board are elected to lead. Here's a great opportunity to start in a meaningful way.

## **What makes you the best candidate for this job?**

Along with Jim Burgess and John Sodt, I am one of the three best candidates for the seats to be elected. I have worked in a large international company, with supervisory experience over teams implementing multi-million dollar projects. I specialize in finding root causes of operational problems and in determining solutions. I understand how to work collaboratively with those on my teams who have greater professional knowledge than I do in a specific area, and how to apply their skills for maximum benefit. The district's nearly \$200 million annual budget is well within the scope of my experience.

Just as my company puts its priority on serving its customers, I believe in providing a high-quality, well-rounded education for our students as the first order of business for our schools. I know that Students First management is the most logical approach for an effective school system. It is a set of practices common in the private sector.

I will take seriously my obligation to represent the students, parents and taxpayers of the district. Jim, John and I are the only candidates who refused to engage in a conflict of interest at the outset of the campaign. We consider ethical behavior an absolute requirement for board members and all employees of the school system. For more on this very important subject, please visit our website at [www.ForResponsibleChange.com](http://www.ForResponsibleChange.com).

## **Is there anything else you'd like to tell the voters?**

Jim Burgess, John Sodt and I are running as a team because we know that electing only one of us will not bring about significant change on a five-member school board. If you agree that student-focused management practices will result in improved educational results, lower taxes and a more respectful environment for parents and taxpayers, please consider voting for Burgess, Davis and Sodt for responsible change.