



The GOP Podcast

Episode 10: Fixing the Board: Pete Wildeboer for New Hanover County Board of Education

Reuel Sample: School safety, restoring education, giving parents a voice and fixing the board. Good evening. This is the NHC GOP podcast. I'm Reuel Sample. I am talking with incumbent candidate Pete Wildeboer for New Hanover County Board of Education. Pete, good evening. Good to see you.

Pete Wildeboer: Good evening, Mr. Sample. Thank you so much for having me here tonight.

Reuel Sample: Oh, please don't call me Mr. Sample. Mr. Sample is my dad and he's probably listening to this podcast and saying, That's right, son. So you have been on the school board now for one and one half years and you are seeking a second term on board, is that correct?

Pete Wildeboer: That is correct, yes. I took over another person's post that had two years left. I was named by the Board of Education by the Republican Party and approved by the Board of Education to take over that role. So I've enjoyed my two years. It's been a very hard, very tough two years with COVID and other things going on. But it's been an enjoyable time. And as long as as long as we continue to focus on putting our students first and educating our students to our very best ability, I think we'll be fine.

Reuel Sample: You're no stranger to education. You have been through the system. You've been a teacher, a coach, a vice principal and a principal. So you really have a great view from down in the trenches for all this.

Pete Wildeboer: Absolutely. I started in New Hanover County at Trask Junior High School. That tells you how long ago it was. And then Junior, then Trask Middle School. I coached at Williston Middle School. I also coached at Laney High School, carried on my career and became an assistant principal, moved from Trask to South Brunswick Middle School and Brunswick County, had a great couple of years there, went on from there to the Early College High School in Brunswick County and enjoyed my time there. And also the alternative school. I had a split position which was trying but a great position to learn. And then I was tapped on the shoulder by Pender County schools, went over there and went to an elementary school and what a great place, North Topsail Elementary School it was. The school, a failing school, had failed for two years. I took over and turned it around. We were a school of distinction my first year there and actually was named Principal of the year in 2013-14 for Pender County schools.

Reuel Sample: That's a resume that's important. Pete is one of four candidates that we need to get on the board. You have been fighting a very lonely battle for the last couple of years. And we need to get you back there to bring that experience back. The things that you're running on. Is is a thing that we're all talking about, school safety. And I want to focus on two aspects of school safety, both inside keeping people who are trying to get into schools and to cause damage and then keeping students safe on the inside as well. So let's talk about the outside stuff. What are your concerns about school safety, about making sure that our schools are a safe place to go?

Pete Wildeboer: Well, I think that's that's crucial. We've seen Sandy Hook. We've seen other places where somebody from the outside comes in and hurts multiple students. We have to make sure that doesn't happen. New Hanover County Schools has made some great inroads in that area. Just even the situation going into schools, you have to go through the office to sign in. I think that's a great first step. I think we need more cameras outside. We need to have one of the the people who is also running for re-election on the Democratic side and said we don't need SROs at the elementary school level.

Reuel Sample: Wait, wait, wait.

Pete Wildeboer: That's crazy. We need as.

Reuel Sample: That can't be right is that they have they have said we don't need more school resource officers safety resource officers in this day and age.

Pete Wildeboer: We don't need any. It was Miss Justice and she said we don't need any at the elementary level that that actually scares our students. And I think that's a great place for students to learn to respect and work with our police officers. I actually have two officers in my family. My daughter just graduated from Basic Law Enforcement. Very proud of her. She was actually president of her class. And that was just in the last few days. And my future son in law is a sheriff's deputy up in Johnson County. So I value I really do value our law enforcement. I also value our SROs. And, of course, those are specialized officers who work in the school system and work with. I can think of several that worked with me over the years that were just second to none. I think back to the late the young lady at South Brunswick. She would actually meet with students, talk to students and try to prevent problems instead of waiting for problems to start. So a well-trained SRO is vital at every, every level.

Reuel Sample: But that takes a joint action not only from the sheriffs, but from you folks on the Board of Education. If you don't want more SROs in there, they're not going to go. Is that correct?

Pete Wildeboer: That is correct. We have what's called an MRU, which is a memorandum of understanding. And we have a basically a mutual agreement with the sheriff's department and the police department because obviously New Hanover and other schools there in the city will use police instead of sheriff's deputies. But they're vital. And I think we need to continue to have more and more officers, you know, teaching like a middle school class called DARE, which is teaching students how to be safe, how to be safe online, how to be safe in other ways, using some some important time for them to be safe so that we don't have anyone break in from the outside. And you had mentioned to from the inside out, we need to look at bullying. I've heard from some folks, you know, and that's one thing is I hear from a lot of parents, a lot of teachers about concerns. I mean, we need to revitalize our school safety teams. Who

knows better than the principal, the teachers and the parents? And students at the high school level, especially? What are some of the safety concerns at the schools? And then they can bring that not only to the school, but also to the central office level to work on fixing those problems. So it's you know, it's one thing to know, have surveys to see what's going on, but the next step is to fix them. And, you know, you really hearing from all the stakeholders about those problems so that we can fix them.

Reuel Sample: I want to.

Pete Wildeboer: I want to the number one thing I used to as. Go ahead.

Reuel Sample: Yeah, I'm sorry. I want to focus on parents here just for a second. But one of the controversial areas that you and I have talked about is this idea of seclusion rooms, which is actually which actually helps protect students against other students, protects the students against themselves. But there's some misnomers about that, some ideas that a seclusion room equals like a seclusion room or a solitary confinement in a prison. And so let's clear that up right now. What is a seclusion room and why would they be used?

Pete Wildeboer: Well, a seclusion room. And I'll be honest. Like I said, I was in education for 34 years before joining the board. And in my 34 years, I knew of one student that was secluded even at the alternative school. And a seclusion room is a small room. There's always an adult monitoring the student, and the student is often brought into it, not often, but as needed, brought into that area so that child has an opportunity to calm down. It's never a situation the parents aren't notified. Parents need to be are in New Hanover County, are notified every time and in most cases, as has been brought out to the board. Parents are on a night what's called an IEP team, an individualized education plan. They sit down with with the educators, with usually an administrator or two, and they talk about what is best for that child. I know a lot of people are. Well, anybody thrown in there know that that tip, to my knowledge, that's that's never happened where a child is thrown in there just randomly or something. But if a child is having what we would call a meltdown, they're often put there. But I've been doing a lot of research about other alternatives. That's why a lot of people are pushing even last night, a lot of people are pushing for. And seclusion now is in seclusion now. Well, if you don't have something else that will enable a child to be successful, then we

don't want to end it right now. We want to get a situation that we can have an alternative where children can be safe, where children can learn. I mean, that's that's a big part of it. We don't you know, in the one situation I was mentioning, we had to clear the whole classroom on numerous occasions because the young person, the young student was having a meltdown. It was becoming violent. And we not only don't want the child to hurt himself or herself, but we don't want them to hurt anyone else, including the teacher.

Reuel Sample: It's a tool among many tools that teachers and school administrators need to have in order to make sure that everybody, including the student who's having a meltdown, can succeed and be safe.

Pete Wildeboer: Correct and keep them safe. And that's the biggest thing. And like I say, I looked at I talked to a gentleman from Maryland who has they've they've ended seclusion rooms in that state of Maryland, not the state, and that that school district. And they came up with some alternatives that Julie Varnum, who is our assistant superintendent in charge of student services, has been also looking into with pads and things like that for a student still bringing them in a room, but not necessarily a room where by themselves. So there would be with adults and the adults would be able to use pads so that they wouldn't be hurt and also the child wouldn't be hurt. So we're looking at all the options we can. And again, number one thing is we have to keep all the students, each of the students safe.

Reuel Sample: You have referred a few times to keeping parents informed. But we have seen not only in New Hanover County, but across the country that parents are realizing that they have not been informed about a lot of things and they have been pushed to the side over a lot of things, simply being told that you're parents, you don't know anything. How are you going to restore parental access and making sure that parents are the primary voice in education and not just a voice to be overlooked?

Pete Wildeboer: Thank you for that question. That's a great question, and it's one of the questions I can answer very easily. I've taken some great steps, as you've mentioned before. I am one of two Republicans on the Board of Education, and probably I would safe to say, the only conservative Republican on the Board of Education. But I have been able to push some some things through with a lot of phone calls, a lot of prayer and some begging going on, I'll be honest. But one of those was the

town hall where we can actually sit down face to face. There seemed to be some concern from some of the other board members. Oh, we can't be you know, I'm never going to shy away from a conversation no matter who is with, because it is important know parents voices are extremely important to me and I want to hear from parents. I do try to answer. I know I get everyone's. Well, you don't answer all your emails. Well, I don't I try my best. I would be 24 seven on emails. But if I especially if it's over an important topic, I will and I answer those. I, I read them all. I'll be honest. I set up hours and hours and read all the emails, but that's only so good as well as the call to audience.

Pete Wildeboer: Call to audiences is okay. It's a it's a tool, but it's not in my thinking. It's not a very good tool because there's not the opportunity for them to hear back. So I think and I'll be honest, I've heard people say, oh, you guys are off there, you're bored. Well, no, I'm taking notes. I'm taking notes. I see who's up there. We have a policy that we ask for if there's a whole big group saying basically the same thing, if at all possible, they could if they could elect a chair person or a spokesperson that would speak for the group, that would give a lot more people the opportunity to speak, which would be great. But if they you know, there's no rule that says they have to do that. But I do take notes. I do reach out to folks afterwards. I've actually talked to one gentleman who's volunteered to take know to kind of be my runner. I need to follow up with him again. And just if there's somebody that is saying something that is really vital to me, go over, get that person's contact information so I can get back with them.

Pete Wildeboer: But back to the town hall idea, I had that idea. I brought it forth. It got passed. I don't think it was a 7-0 vote, but it did get passed. So we have three opportunities during the year to sit down with folks to hear from them. It is at the discretion of the chairperson exactly how that works. But we had an extended call audience, which I pushed back hard, and now we're at least having a town hall situation where somebody can ask a question, we can all talk back and have interaction, answer the questions and hopefully get some resolution for folks and or an avenue. I have a one gentleman that's contacted me several times from the Myrtle Grove area about some traffic issues. I can't necessarily fix those, but I can put that person in contact with somebody that can help them. So it is vital. Everybody that was on the board before has ran has run on transparency. And I've made that comment more than once. So we're not very transparent to parents. So we need to be more transparent. We need to hear

from parents, but we need to not only hear from parents, we need to be able to talk with parents about concerns.

Reuel Sample: But the big thing is, is that there is a a dedication on your part and on your fellow Republicans park to get involved with parents, not shut them out, not just at the at the school board level, but but we are fighting for access of parents to schools, to curriculum. You were instrumental in helping to push through the curriculum online, weren't you? And to get so that parents can see that online and to see at least a large portion of what their kids are going to be taught in school.

Pete Wildeboer: Absolutely. Thank you for reminding you that. Yes, I did. There was some pushback on that, too. But I said, you know, we really need to have that. Our new chief officer of academics came online and joined with me. And actually it was great. I got to say, Dr. Fraser was very, very great about that. She actually brought me in on several important topics and including the grading, but also on which we also got rid of the 50, which is an important discussion topic, but we were able to get that online where parents can see that and have a voice if they have concern. Again, I have cards and it was interesting because when I originally got my cards, they had the school board's central offices number and I said, no, I need to have my number on it so they can contact me, not contact somebody that might get me a message in two or three days. It could be a vital situation that they need to answer soon. So that's and I'll be honest, I'm the only one that I know of on the board that has their own personal number on on their cards. Everybody else's is the school board, the central office number. And that's just a small thing, but I think it is a vital thing to show that it is important to me to hear from folks and have a conversation with folks.

Reuel Sample: And I'll tell you what, if you're listening to this, or watching this. If you haven't checked out that curriculum site, make sure that you do. And Pete is not blowing smoke, is that he wants you to call him, is that he's going to put his phone number out there and he wants you to call him or his representatives to to talk to them. Pete, let's talk about one more thing. We we've we've talked about the school board and we know that you are a lone voice on there. But it's not just the fact that it's loaded with with Democrats. It's a very poorly run school board. There's a lot of fixing to be done. Can you tell us a little bit about what's going on?

Pete Wildeboer: Well, you know, I'll be honest. I've heard from multiple sources that we are the laughing stock of the state and that unfortunately it's true. I have two principle friends that say that they get together, they have a cold iced tea or whatever they're going to drink that night, a thing of popcorn. And they watch us. And we're not we're not supposed to be. It'd be great if they watch us for a good reason to see what we're going to do positive for students. But unfortunately, they're watching to see all the chaos that goes on day in and day out on the Board of Education. Last night was a perfect example of that, and we need to get back to a place we can at least be civil with each other. Several of my colleagues on the board said, nahlet's let's wait for the new board to come in. Let's let them decide this. I'm like, no, we have you know, I'm there to work, so let's continue to work until the elections then I hope to continue to work after that. But I mean, we need to get we need to set a strong base at this time. We need to continue to work to improve. We call on our schools to do that. We call on our teachers to do that. We call on our students to do that.

Pete Wildeboer: And we as a school board need to lead that. By last night, I was able to push through a refresher course in Robert's Rules of Order. We had, of course, last year we did it for a month, and then it's gone away. And the bickering between board members and as you mentioned, I'm one of the only two Republicans and the only conservative person. So a lot of that's between Democrats and Democrats. And that's unfortunate. And I don't think we need to be doing that. And I said that for my whole time on the Board of Education. We need to work together for the betterment of the students. We need to work to educate our students. That's that's our number one job, not to argue and to realize and to do this kind of thing. So I was I was amazed that yesterday, actually, there was a big discussion of some pushback, but we got a 7-0 vote to in favor of a refresher course. And I'll be honest, I was on another show this morning and said very clearly, that's not going to solve all the problems. It's not. It's but it is a very important first step. I was pleased to see it was 7-0 vote, unified vote in favor of that. And I know that's only a first step.

Pete Wildeboer: That's but it is a first step in the right direction. So I think we need to continue. I think we need to have strong leadership in the chair position, someone that will follow Robert's rules of order, enforce them. And I think it's a situation that we want to continue to improve. I mean, I don't agree on a lot of things with my colleagues, but I don't roll my eyes at them. I don't call them out or or whatever else because I want to be

a good example, a good Christian example for for the students, for the for the teachers that are there watching, for the parents that are watching. And I think that's a vital thing. If I start lowering myself to bickering and name calling on the dais, I think that doesn't help anyone. And I think that's one of the big things we need to get away from as a school board. I do want to touch on your point. You said before, even if we get four Republicans, which is my hope on three others, to join me on the on the board, we're not going to agree on everything, but at least we can work together as a team to do to put students as our number one priority and parents and teachers as our next priorities so that the school system can be a wonderful one.

Pete Wildeboer: One person said that yesterday, we need to have the best school system in the county excuse me, in the state. And we need to some people have raised the idea. What about charter schools? You know, I bring I welcome charter schools. I think charter schools are wonderful in the idea that they raise the bar for everyone. Everyone needs to know. That's a that's a challenge. We need to make our school system so good that people won't even look at charter schools. They'll say, I want my children at your schools as the principal of North Topsail. That's why I got into this, because I had so many people leaving New Hanover County schools begging me to, Oh, I want to be in your school. I want to have what you have. Well, I want to make the whole school system like that where people are running from other schools, from private schools, from charter schools, and just wanting to be in our schools, every single one of our schools, so that it just it's great. We have some great principals. We have some great teachers, teacher assistants. They work very, very hard. We need to support them. We need to support them financially. We need to support them. We need to make it a great place to teach and to learn.

Reuel Sample: Pete Wildeboer for New Hanover County Board of Education. You're working to get your name out there, to talk to people, to introduce you to people. How can folks get a hold of you?

Pete Wildeboer: Great question, and thank you for that. We have several ways. Let me give you my phone number. As we mentioned, 910-620-8443. 910-620-8443. Wildeboer for NHCS Board of Education is my Facebook page. WildeboerForEducation.com is my website. I love to hear from you. You can also contact me on my email, my school email, which is Pete.Wildeboer.NHCS.net.

Reuel Sample: Pete, so great to have you on board. We're going to get you on that board of Education again. We're going to get three other Republicans on board. We're going to change New Hanover County. We're going to join the list of people across the country that has taken back their education.

Pete Wildeboer: Thank you. Reuel. Thank you so much. And again, it's all about, in my mind educating our students. So please join me. Please join the other three so we can take over this board. We can have a strong Republican conservative Christian leadership there. So we can do the very, very best for our students, for our staff and for our parents. Thank you so much.