



## **The NHC GOP Podcast**

*Episode 20: Academic Excellence: Jose Barnhart for New Hanover County Board of Education*

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**Reuel Sample:** Protecting parents rights, strengthening school safety, restoring administrative accountability. Great to have Josie Barnhart back on the show with us. Josie, how are you doing tonight?

**Josie Barnhart:** I am doing well, Reuel. Thanks for having me again. It's we are in the home stretch here, but it is encouraging and exciting to kind of touch base with why we started this journey.

**Reuel Sample:** I hope you're a sprinter because it's sprint time now with early voting going on and people are turning out to the polls. I want to talk to you about what you're talking to parents about. You're going out, you're talking to them. You're at the early voting booths and you're talking to parents at schools. What's the number one thing that parents are talking to you about?

**Josie Barnhart:** I would say it's academic excellence. I just had a conversation with a mom today about her child not really being challenged and a younger learner AIG starts in third grade, which is really for our gifted and talented students. But her daughter is in first grade. And so she was talking about really, is her daughter being challenged where she's at? And so that is a concern with any parent. No matter where you are on the spectrum of educational growth, you want to make sure that your kids are learning what they need to be doing, as well as making sure that growth is happening, period, no matter where they are in the in the growth spectrum.

**Reuel Sample:** Now, the question is, why aren't our children being challenged? We're coming off of two years of of COVID stuff, but there's got to be something else going on there.

**Josie Barnhart:** There is a lot of pressure on remediation. And so when you look at a school and typically schools have either a high success rate or a really bad failing rate. And so when you have a heavy emphasis on remediation, then maybe some of your other areas might get overlooked, like it might not be the most important to challenge to excellence. If you have 60% of your class failing and need to be brought up. So for a teacher, they have a standard. This is first grade, second grade, third grade. This is what you need to teach. This is where your students need to be to be successful. And so that's always kind of the minimum standard where you need to get to. You either look at how you support your kids to bring them up, or you look at how you challenge them to go beyond. And so for me, when I talk to parents, that is probably the biggest concern that all of their kids are growing academically where they want them to be.

**Reuel Sample:** We talk about parents a lot and the fact that parents seem to, under the guidance of Democrats in the school board, have lost a lot of say in how their kids are doing in school. Do you see parents talking about that and just saying, why can't I get more input into what my students are, what my children are doing?

**Josie Barnhart:** Oh, absolutely. I think numbers speak bounds and we have lost about 1000 families each year for the last three years at a time where Wilmington is busting at the seams and population at a time where we have increased the number of classes that we offer, we've increased our pre-K program by six classes for the past two years.

So we've added 12 more classes of and taking roughly 15 kids at a pace. But we're seeing a decline in numbers. And so a lot of that comes down to, I see multiple factors, but one is content and which is being taught. One is the safety and talking discipline in particular of concerns. They're sending their kids to school where fights, violence, bullying, harassment, weapons are being brought to school and so. Where where's the disconnect here? And the disconnect is parents are not happy with the school system as a whole. And so what we've seen with more options that parents can choose a different education path for their kids, they're going to take it when they can. And so what the public school is, is seeing is they're seeing the negative dollar amounts that they're now not getting because parents are saying, I'm going to do what's best for my child, period. And you guys are going to be left to figure out all your stuff that's going on that should be stopped.

**Reuel Sample:** So they're taking their children out of the schools and they're either home schooling them or sending them to private schools or finding other options.

**Josie Barnhart:** Right.

**Reuel Sample:** And schools get money based upon the number of children sitting in the seats.

**Josie Barnhart:** Yeah, there's an enrollment count. I think it's 20 days after the school year starts. And so then that's how much funding you get from a state level and federal level as well. I think local dollars to make a of it.

**Reuel Sample:** Let's talk about something that's really tough. And so if you if you are a parent listening to this and you've got children in the room, you might want to put them out of the room for a little bit because one of the things that we're seeing over and over again is an increasing amount of the sexualization of the education of our kids. This is a tough topic to talk about what's going on.

**Josie Barnhart:** So there has been a push with gender affirming ideologies in our in our school system, and it's been embedded into curriculum. And this is not just necessarily a teacher classroom push. This is even on a state level and federal level. We have seen there is a push at the federal level to do gender affirming practices in care without

parental consent under the guise of Title nine. And that's been pushed through. I think it's being challenged and there's a waiting period of process. So it hasn't been fully vetted. We've seen a state level that has incorporated gender identity into the history standards. There is no grade level attachment to that, meaning if a teacher chooses to interpret and utilize gender identity in a kindergarten classroom, the state says that's openly justifiable. And this is where that slippery slope is. And redefining the line of saying schools are meant for academics. There should not be any secrets or half truth telling with what we are doing at school with our kids because we are a relationship builder. In order for me to really embrace my daughter's education growth, I need to be working with teachers. And if the teacher is going to intentionally keep something from me because they believe that I might react in a different way that they see as acceptable, that is not a pill I'm going to swallow as a parent because she's my daughter and I will love and support my child's teacher for academics.

**Josie Barnhart:** But she or he does not get to decide what is appropriate or not appropriate in our house. And so because it's kind of been done in a pseudo secretive way, that's one of the things social emotional learning is actually not on our curriculum website. So I've already given that feedback and have encouraged others to please give that feedback as well, because in those lessons really social justice issues do come up and gender identity is one of those things. And so really we need to know how it's being addressed for parents to decide whether or not they deem it appropriate. But in this in this area, I absolutely think that parents get to be the decider of what is or is not. And as well as this has been incorporated into sex ed, too, I mean, we've changed from sex ed. It used to be about an anatomy reproduction, and now we've turned it into preferences of different sorts. And so I think parents have a right to know.

**Reuel Sample:** I remember as a student that you had two weeks of sex education and then you went on to something else. And it was the most awkward time in high school. Then we went back to academics. We talk about all these issues, Josie. And it's easy to point out the problems. How are you going to fix these? Let's let's start with this last one first, because you're up against state mandates that you're going to have to do some heavy lifting against. So how can you fix this both in the short term and the long term?

**Josie Barnhart:** I would like to see a policy in place. And this I haven't combed through all of the policy manual, but to ensure that we are not keeping secrets, if you will. I don't like to say like that. I don't like to be intentional. I know there. There's a lot of really hard working good people in our school system. But to be intentional of saying what do schools have to share with parents? And I think anything that deals with mental health, which that is one of the things I mean, it becomes a health care issue, but mental health parents have the right to know and be informed about what's going on, because there is a lot of home care parents that is going into that. And so as well as having access without having to request it and that was something that I heard commentary after the forum. I said, parents don't have access. And they said, well, you know, they already do. Well, we have access if we request it. And I think that we need to go ahead and flip that on the head and say the district needs to be very transparent with what the expectation is as far as what is being taught, so that when an issue comes up and I say, whoa, you know, my kids said they got a pronoun surprise quiz in English class, like, what's going on? I'd like to know more.

**Josie Barnhart:** I can clearly see this was supposed to happen or this was not supposed to happen and then address it at the time, because right now we as parents don't really have a leg to stand on. It's almost as if if I request to get the lessons ahead of time, I'm putting more work on the teachers, creating this division, which we don't want to be happening. And then almost like a pseudo I'm trying to get you as a parent if I'm requesting it. And so we need to put a stop to that. We've started developing a curriculum website - New Hanover County Schools has - which I think is a positive, and I think we're going to continue to add to that. I think that we can really embrace teachers and incentivize teachers to develop content that's appropriate, that's merited, that's accessible to everybody. It's going to support growth, it's going to support remediation, is going to support higher learning, and it's going to be common ground. This is the expectation very clearly different from just having a set of standards.

**Josie Barnhart:** Anybody can go to the North Carolina Department of Education and look up, what are you supposed to learn for history? What are you supposed to learn from math and do that? What this curriculum website for New Hanover County is actually giving the lessons of this is Eureka Math. This is unit one, Eureka math, and this is how we're doing it.

**Josie Barnhart:** But I will say that I think a lot in part comes from our teachers union pushing a certain narrative. I mean, it's very clear on their Facebook page, on their social media, they say we have to elect Democrat leaders because more money is going to fix the problem. Kids are not a test score. But the whole point of school is having formal learning as having specific things that we're supposed to be teaching our kids and and content. And I think for such a long time it was just that trust of teachers you're going to teach. And but then when you start seeing issues of sexuality and gender identity, you say, Wait, wait a second. Are our teachers undermining me as a parent? That's when parents get a little bit uncomfortable.

**Reuel Sample:** You mentioned briefly. SROs. You are all in favor of of increasing that safety officer, that police presence within our schools.

**Josie Barnhart:** Yes. And we actually last year was the first year that there was an SRO officer and a mental health counselor at every school. And so then that begs the question, like, why did we not have them before? But this is definitely something that when we work with the Wilmington Police Department and the sheriff's department, that we need to continue to collaborate with that because we have seen an increase in violence, particularly of juvenile violence. And in a worst case in the last resort scenario, they definitely need to be there to protect our teachers and our students because they are not there for defense mechanisms. We need to have other defensive mechanisms in place, such as locked doors and single entry, multiple exits. Having a system, I would love to see a system that alerts the police. We have systems in place with our school system that will alert specific people, but then to go on to the police department so they can be responsive in an emergency situation. And those are things are hard to discuss openly because you don't want to tell everything what's going on in the school system for safety purposes because you don't want intruders taking advantage of that.

**Reuel Sample:** And let's be clear, is that your Democrat opponents are very much against an increased police presence in in the schools. They they really want to get away from SROs completely. One of them said no SROs in elementary schools at all. And and we're living in a time where crime is on the increase especially in our schools. And schools are meant to be places of learning. So if you make them safe, the kids will learn.

**Josie Barnhart:** Well, and that goes to the same thought process is there has been a shift in saying we'll just treat the problem and focusing on mental health. Right. And so they're saying, you know, it's doing nothing for the justification of having a school resource officer there. The missing connection piece is this is what you're saying is trying to do something preemptively is great. I think it's great. However, what happens when that worst case scenario does happen?

**Reuel Sample:** We don't want our kids playing defensive education. That we want them to go and get it. And this whole idea of of our school systems and the quality of our education is a constant theme, not only for the four of you who are running for the school board, but it's in our in our state legislatures, in our in our national legislatures, all the way up to our talking about our Supreme Court folks here. And this whole idea of getting it right for our next generation is so important. And you are out there on the front lines and you're fighting this every single day and that's a great thing. Josie Barnhart, tell people how they can get in touch with you. You're going to be out there working the polls all the way up to and including Election Day. So they're going to see you at some point, right?

**Josie Barnhart:** Yes, I mean, I'm around. I don't have a set schedule. It's kind of I'm at the mercy of my three kids. But yeah, I'll be out out there talking with people and just being reachable. I've met so many staff and family members that are just grateful for a voice of reason. I like to say that I call myself lovingly. But Josie for schools, it's [josieforschools.com](http://josieforschools.com), and it has my Google voice on there so you can call me. I've actually had quite a few voters, and so thank you to you guys who have called and said, Well, what do you think about this? Or are you for banning books or all these things? And so I'm really able to engage in a lot of really good conversations. And I want you to know that I do want to have conversations. And so I know everyone has their opinions probably by now of who they're going to vote for. But if you have any questions for me or you have input on issues with certain policies, I'd love to hear because we have to make things better. And I know it's one day at a time.