



## **The NHC GOP Podcast**

*Season 2*

*Episode 1: Chairman of the Board: Conversation with Pete Wildeboer*

**Reuel Sample:** Welcome to this first GOP podcast of the New Year. I'm Reuel Sample. Honored to be talking with Pete Wildeboer, the chair of the Hanover Board of Education. Good evening. How are you?

**Pete Wildeboer:** I'm great. Thank you so much for having me here today. I didn't even call you Mr. Sample this time.

**Reuel Sample:** Not yet. The night is still young. Congratulations to you. You are the the new chairman of the Board of Education after a very, very tough race.

**Pete Wildeboer:** Yeah, it was. It was a tough race. But I was really excited to see four Republicans come across in the top four places. I'll be honest, when I stepped into that, that victory party with the GOP, I looked up there and I saw that I was in sixth place and that the Democrats were in one through four. And I was like, Wow. I talked to my campaign manager, Pete DIVOKY, and I said, Maybe I really need to start working on my golf game. I think we both laughed and said, I'm not sure you're going to you're going to come back for this. But I mean, I do believe the good Lord intervened. And when two of us popped up there, Pat Bradford and I popped up into the top four. And then all of a sudden, ultimately all four of us did. And so I think there's going to be some great things done by our Board of Education. We we have plans. Even this Friday, we'll be meeting, having a retreat, getting rolling up the sleeves, really working hard. I'm not

one that we need to be on the dais to do everything and look all official. We need to we need to roll up our sleeves and get some some really good things done for our students, for our faculties. Get back to the basics of education.

**Reuel Sample:** And I am told that with the chairmanship, there's going to be no tie. So we are in a we're in a day and age where we have gotten back to the idea of holding our elected officials accountable to their platforms that they ran on. And you and your other Republican candidates, one of the biggest things that you ran on was parental rights and and parents being able to know what's going on in the classrooms with their kids. What are the what are the areas that you're tackling? What are the things that you're looking at right off the bat to get parents back in their rightful place?

**Pete Wildeboer:** Well, I think it is really important. It's a partnership. It's not us against them. And for too many years it's been us against them. And I don't mean just in New Hanover County, I mean throughout the country where it's things like somebody comes up and speaks their mind and we're shutting them down because they're terrorists or something, That's that's crazy. We need we need parent support. We need parents to be partner, hand-in-glove with us working together to help their children's education. It's their child. We are in loco parentis. We work with them. But it is really, really important to work with them and and respect. I mean, it needs to be mutual respect. I remember 112 years ago when I was a child, you know, my parents said if the parent if the teacher said it happened or the teacher said this, that's what happened. And I mean, I'm not saying we have to blindly say everything that teachers say is correct, but I mean, we need to go in there with that attitude and we're going to work together with parents. We have a lot of great things. We have a parent portal we'll be talking about on Friday to give parents a new way to talk to us. We need to expand the call audience to you know, I did I did do that. One of the things I did was able to get done during my first two years.

**Pete Wildeboer:** We have those town halls where we can we can hear from people, but we need to hear from a lot more parents. It doesn't need to be the same small group to show up every time We want to hear from them, but we want to hear from everyone else that has concerns as well. So the more ways we can hear from parents, the better I think will be, because we do need to address the bigger concerns that a lot of people have.

**Pete Wildeboer:** And another one of the big ones is safety. I mean, we have every one of the seven of us I mentioned that the other day to to to the whole board. Every one of the seven of us ran on student safety, on improving student safety. And we really have to do that because if a student doesn't feel safe, they're looking over their shoulder for whatever reason. They're not learning, they're not working. Their brain isn't working at the highest levels where it can. And, you know, we saw the other day, we're we're about three years behind in education, educating our children pandemic. So we have to do everything we can to really focus on education and letting the teachers teach, having the administrators support them and know what's going on in the schools so that we can teach the highest level and we can catch our students up.

**Reuel Sample:** One of the things that we've talked about here on this podcast and in other places across the country, going back to what parents are seeing their kids come home from school is. Some of the books that they're reading, some of the topics that they're studying. It's in some places the school board would shut down a parent because they are reading something from a book. And and they they had they had laws against that kind of language in a public forum. Are we facing that kind of stuff here in New Hanover.

**Pete Wildeboer:** We've actually had that in our board meetings where somebody comes up and said, I'm going to read from a book that I got from one of the high schools and they start reading and it's graphic and, you know, and former chairs would gavel them and say, you can't read that in here. And it's like, but this book came from whatever high school it was. So we have to we have to look at that. We have to look at forming a committee that can really look at that we don't need. If a parent wants back to parents rights parent, if a parent wants their child to read that at home, that's between them and the parent. But the school does not need to be the source of some kind of a something that is beyond anything that could be literally looked at as literacy. I used to have when I was a principal of elementary school, I'd have situations where somebody would bring a book like that. Not nearly as bad as that, but a book like that. And I would go to the teacher and say, Can't we find something that will give them the same positive things without having this negative? And I mean, that's what we need to look at. I mean, we're not stamping on First Amendment rights. If a parent wants a child to read that, then they can do that inside of their own home. That's their choice, totally up to them. I'm not saying we should stop them from doing that in their home, but in the school

system, we just don't need that kind of thing. We need we need to to look at that, look very closely at that and make it a situation that, again, keeping the children safe. I mean, even from things like that. I mean, that's to me, that's that's another way that is negatively impacting our students.

**Reuel Sample:** Things like that, though, just to just to put it in perspective, those kind of books didn't get put into our schools overnight and getting those books out of our schools and that kind of mindset out of our schools isn't going to happen overnight either. It's not just going to happen at a Friday school board and it all goes away.

**Pete Wildeboer:** No, we you know, that's one of the things. But we need and one of the biggest things that the Board of Education does is put policies in place. And we need to put policies that will positively reflect that, that concern, and so that in the future it doesn't happen. And we need to look at what we have in schools now. Librarians are fantastic people. I had when I was at North Topsail, we had two just fantastic librarians. They know what's in their libraries, they know what's going on. And if we give them the authority to say, hey, you know, this is something that I really question, that we need to again, have a policy in place, that it can be questioned, brought before either a subcommittee of the board or in front of the whole board. And we can we can just we should read it or read as much as we feel is necessary. And, you know, and then if it is any, you know, you look at different grade levels, too. But you know, at the elementary level, you don't need any of that. I don't think especially some of that graphic stuff doesn't need to be at any level, to be honest. Right.

**Reuel Sample:** Right. One of the other things that we talked about before the podcast is that you said we had how many schools fail standards. Was it 18 that you said.

**Pete Wildeboer:** The 13, 13, 13 Yeah. And, you know, and there are some some that didn't, you know, were not looked at as low performing schools because they exceeded growth. There's there's two measures there is the grade ABCD or F and then you have whether they exceed growth, meet growth or don't meet growth. And some we had several schools that were like F schools and didn't meet growth. So in other words, they didn't even get a year's worth of growth out of a year and they were already in F school. So we need to really focus on those schools. We need to focus on all our schools, of course, but we need to really focus on those schools and look at ways the school I took

over. I'll be honest, North Topsail was a great school. I was very blessed to be there, but it hadn't back in those days. It was called didn't make it didn't make scores and it had not made scores for two years. And I'm not going to say it was anything to do with the board, but I had a great staff when I took over the school and we worked very hard together and with parents, including parents, as being a vital part of that whole equation.

**Pete Wildeboer:** And we're able to change the school system of the school excuse me, from a school, a low performing school for two years to a school of distinction in one year. We carried on from there. And it just was a lot of us dealing with expectations. If the if school feels like we've always failed or we're a failing school, then they're going to continue to be a failing school. But you need to have someone, a leader, come in and change that perception. And we want to make it.

**Pete Wildeboer:** You know, you can talk about charter schools and we want to make it our charter schools, good or bad? Well, they take money away from the school system, but they also challenge the school system and give us an opportunity to you know, I'm always up for a good challenge. So I think we need to continue to to make it and we need to make it to the point where, you know, no one wants to go somewhere else. No one wants to go to a private school or a charter school because New Hanover County schools are that good as a whole. So just not some of them.

**Reuel Sample:** We talked back in November about Principals being the captain of their ships is that we can talk about teachers, we can talk about school boards. But it really comes down to principals getting it all done in their local school schools, in their local schools. Have you had a chance to talk to any principals since you've gotten gotten in there?

**Pete Wildeboer:** Well, you know, I that's one of the things I the best part. One of the best parts of the job, I'll say, is going to schools. You know, I was told by one board member before that, well, they don't like when you come. Well, I disagree. Everywhere I've gone, all the schools I've gone to and I still have not gone to every single school, but I've gone to just about every school. And I need to get back out there. When I was going running for re-election, I kind of curtail my time out there. But yeah, I've talked to a lot of principals. A lot of principals are excited that I'm the chair, a lot of principals, I do have three students, former students that are now principals. So yeah, I'm 112, but it's a

good thing. Well, it is. And a lot of a lot of others that I went to school with. There was one point that every single high school principal was either a colleague at one point or the other or a former student. So, you know, and they are the principal runs a ship. Teachers are vitally, vitally important. All the staff is vitally vital, important. But your principal sets the tone for the school. And so it is crucial that we have great people.

**Pete Wildeboer:** We just hired a great person, a former colleague of mine from from Pender County to one of the low performing schools, and I'm so excited that he's come on board. I won't mention his name yet, but he's come on board and I think he's going to turn that school around in a real positive way. And so I'm so, so excited to see him join. I have several colleagues that work with me either in Brunswick County or in Pender County. That and it's great because I had one middle school principal that was a very good friend of mine. He's a was a colleague of mine in Pender County. And I went to his school one day and I always tell principals it's a bad time. Please tell me I'll go somewhere else. No, no hard feelings. And he said, Yeah, you when I'm in middle something. I said, All right, I'll come back Another day turned around and he said, Pete, I trust you. Walk around, go, go see what's going on. And just gave me kind of carte blanche to walk around the school and talk to people. I get stopped by one substitute, and that school was interesting. She she stopped and she said, You better not take Mr. Madden away from here, because Mr. Madden is the best thing that's ever happened to this school. And. All right. And of course, Mr. Madden is is our principal of the year, so congratulations to him on that. But well deserved. And but it's interesting that, you know, that's I have that kind of just getting along with with people that, you know, that I don't you know, there's some some new people that I don't know that I didn't teach or work with or something. And, you know, I get a lot of the same thing. You know, can we sit down and talk? Let's do it, you know, because I want to know what's going on in the schools. And I had one guy that, you know, is a friend of mine, and he said, Can you stop by my school because we're having trouble with buses. And I think you maybe you could help fix that problem. And I stopped by. I talked to the principal and a couple of other folks, some of the bus drivers, and was able to talk to central office. And it is a lot better right now. That's I'm not saying it was because of me, but, you know, a little bit of a little grease on the wheel sometimes helps.

**Reuel Sample:** I remember in the campaign you were actually out there directing buses at one point. So buses seems to be your your forte.

**Pete Wildeboer:** Well, we have assistant principal for quite a while. So, yeah, I love running dealing with the buses. I actually have my CDL, which I don't want to put out to to, you know, because within we're running short on the bus driver, we'll get the chairman of the board out there to drive that bus, you know.

**Reuel Sample:** So school safety, what are some of the quick things that you can address in school safety.

**Pete Wildeboer:** Lot about I'm excited about this meeting on Friday because we have some folks coming in with some new ideas. You know, we have some schools that have a lot of open doors and we need to address that. We need to keep in we need to keep them safe from the inside and from the outside. And we've had unfortunately, in this area, we had a school shooting in New Hanover County. We also had another one in Oslow County. So we need to make sure that we keep everybody safe. And there are so many new things that can be done. Like I was talking to the superintendent the other day about the idea of putting drones, having drones out to to look at the outside of buildings. We have a we have a company that's coming in to talk to us on Friday about some new ideas and some things they can do. The Vice-Chair and I met with a gentleman the other day who is a former Navy SEAL, and he's got some ideas. So, I mean, a lot of times it's pulling in. Community, everybody you can to to try to to make it as best as possible.

**Reuel Sample:** And and as always it's that it's that it's that mixture of of keeping our schools safe and not creating Fort Knox's is that. Well that's true and the technology that you're looking at like drones and other things gives you that security. Right. Without throwing up the barbed wire.

**Pete Wildeboer:** Right. Right. And and one of the schools with high schools was talking about putting up fences and doing this and doing that. And it's like you do you start making it look like like a like you say, Fort Knox or whatever, a prison even. And we don't want that. We want we want a welcoming place. One of the first things I did when I took over North Topsail was I put a big sign out front "welcome". And I meant it. You know, I wanted people, everybody to come in. Of course, all the good people come in. But, you know, we want to keep people safe, but we also want to welcome and we don't

want to have where you have to get in through four locked doors or something. So it is, as you say, it's a fine balance. We want to keep students, faculty, everyone safe, but we also want to make it a welcoming place and a place where children want and I call them children. I know some are 18 years old and taller than I am, but still we want young people to want to come to school and and enjoy being there.

**Reuel Sample:** You've got your first meeting on Friday. And the first the first meeting as you as chair and everybody is sat down there be behind the stuff and taking up their positions. What what else are you is on the plate that you can share with us that people should know.

**Pete Wildeboer:** We've talked a little bit about academics getting the academics back up. And I mean, there's so many other things that are pulling it at time right now. And we have just just a brief amount of time each and every day. So we need to really get back to focusing on educating our children. Getting them third grade is a huge grade, getting them to grade level reading by third grade. That is huge. You mentioned parental rights curriculum. We need to look at curriculum know and a lot of people are like, well, the board, you know, the state board gives it to you. You've got to do it. Well, you look at Brunswick County, for instance, Brunswick County actually passed a policy that said there were certain things like CRT that they would they would not teach. So the local boards do have some control over that. We need to look at that. And the other big thing in front of us right now is we are in budget season, so we have to work with our partners, the county commissioners, very closely. We've already discussed things. We're excited that Bill Reichenbach is the chair of the County Commissioners, so we'll be working very closely with him and the rest of the county commissioners as we look forward to a really strong budget season. We need to support our staff. We need to get new schools built. We have a lot of things on the agenda in that area.

**Reuel Sample:** What's the best way to keep open those lines of communication between you and families?

**Pete Wildeboer:** Well, you can you can email me, obviously, Pete, not Peter, but Pete Wildeboer will be over at hcso dot net my cell number 9106208443 that those are probably the two best ways to get up with me and I will try to return. I use the same idea that I used when I was a principal. I tried to return phone calls within 24 hours. So you



may not get me right off, but I will try to get back to you within 24 hours. Come out to a Board of Education meeting. We have one next Tuesday. We do have a called audience time and unfortunately, at that point we don't respond back and forth. But I do take notes. A lot of people say, Oh, you guys are up there on your phone. So if I'm on my phone, it's because somebody is texting me something about what's going on. Maybe. But more often than not, I'm taking notes. And we do have in case people don't know when they do sign up to go to call the audience, their email is there so we can respond and talk back and forth that way too. So that gives us that that that avenue to be able to speak with them.

**Reuel Sample:** You know, we've talked a lot about leadership being in the schools, but Pete Wildeboer has taken up the leadership at New Hanover Board of Education. So glad to have you be here, Pete, and I look forward to talking with you some more and what's going on and all the best. Congratulations again, Pete. Thanks for being here.