



THE NHC GOP Podcast Transcript

Season 3, Episode 6: Passion for Education: Conversation with Aubrey Tuell – Republican Candidate for New Hanover County Commission

Reuel Sample: Welcome to the NHC GOP podcast I'm Reuel Sample. I'm happy to be joined by Aubrey Tuell, a very good friend, even though she makes me feel very, very, very ancient. Welcome aboard, Aubrey, and thanks for joining us on the podcast.

Aubrey Tuell: Thank you for having me on Reuel. It's a pleasure to be here.

Reuel Sample: You are running for New Hanover County Board of Education, and you're actually coming hot back from a campaign event. How is it going out there, and what are people telling you about as you as you get to know voters across the county?

Aubrey Tuell: Yeah. So this has just been a great experience so far. Getting to meet families, parents, children, teachers, staff and just getting to interact with the community and hear exactly what they think are the most important issues. Something I hold really close to my heart, and what I think it means to be a true elected official is really representing the voice of the people who voted for you, and people who didn't vote for you because you represent an entire host of people. Some people maybe won't vote for you, but you still represent them as an elected official. And so getting and having those conversations with everyone and hearing what they care most about is something that's really important to me.

Reuel Sample: I want to get a tough question out of the way first. Is that you are the youngest candidate on the ballot. Why should people trust you with their kids?

Aubrey Tuell: I think that's a really good question, and people have brought that up to me countless times. But personally, and I've also heard from multiple people that that's also my greatest asset and what makes them want to vote for me. I was in the public school system just five years ago, and when I was there, I had proven results of providing academic opportunity and success for all students. I think recently what the direction our board has gone in and throughout the past decades has been a group of individuals who don't necessarily know what it's like to be in the school system every single day. It's important that we have parents there. It's important that we have retired educators, retired principals, retired, higher staff there. But we're missing a voice on our board and we've been missing a voice on our board. And that is a voice from a former student that was recently in the public education system and has proven success.

Reuel Sample: Studies are showing that New Hanover County is the number one place in North Carolina that millennials are moving to. How are you going to reach out to specifically those of the millennial generation and younger, as they bring people to this area? What are they worried about?

Aubrey Tuell: So millennials and Gen Z, the generation that I'm in, we have become so focused on seeing people that look like us. There's been a huge push to get the younger generations involved in politics because it makes them feel like they are more represented. And so all of my friends from across the country have just been so encouraging of this, because this is something that a lot of young people want to do, but maybe aren't in the right position to do so. Maybe they have young, young kids and can't donate the time to this. And so I'm just very fortunate that I am in this position and that I've gathered so much support from the younger generations, and I look forward to being a voice for them, but everyone as well.

Reuel Sample: We are facing a big division in this, in the school board and the administration. Sometimes it feels as if you've got all these camps that are just kind of congealing around each other and they're not really talking to each other anymore. They're just throwing bombs at each other. What are you going to do about the splits, the divisions, the cross-purposes between, say, the school board and the school administration that handles the day to day running of the county schools.

Aubrey Tuell: I think that's something that's really important, because unless we are able to foster an environment where everyone feels trusted, they feel like their higher ups are being transparent with them. I think that that's truly the only way that we are going to succeed as a school system. We I've spoken to many teachers, staff members from all, all sides of the aisles, and they are scared for their jobs. We are functioning in an \$11 million deficit, and these teachers and staff members are going to work every day, and they're giving their each and all to our children, our students, to educate them. But they go home and they think in their heads when they're talking to fellow staff members, they say, are we going to be here next year for the 2425 school year? And that's a really hard reality to come to. And so I think it's important that we let our student facing positions know our teachers, our staff members that interact with students every day that they will be here to stay because we cannot afford to cut positions in those areas. I don't know if you know this or not. I was actually shocked when I found this out, but do you know how many people we have working in our HR department for New Hanover County Schools?

Reuel Sample: I don't, I don't.

Aubrey Tuell: 26 individuals, 26 individuals working in one department in central office. That blew my mind. That is looking at all sorts of departments that are functioning like that. I'm sure they don't need 26 people in that department to function, you know, and to function good and like they should. And so I think it's important that we look at all of these departments that aren't necessarily interacting with students every day because we have \$11 million we have to make up, and that is where we need to do it. We can't sacrifice the academic opportunity and success of our students.

Reuel Sample: One of the hot topics right now, it's being talked about by a variety of of commissioner, commissioners of the school board members is the Mosley School controversy of bringing in what they are calling a welcoming school? And, what's your take on all that? Where what direction should the school board go in in this kind of school?

Aubrey Tuell: Well, first off, I was in a I was in a school board meeting and I heard from these Mosley students and how much that environment and that program meant to

them, and it really broke my heart to see some of them were crying, giving their speeches, and that that touched me. It really broke my heart.

Reuel Sample: More of all of that in just a second. Bidenomics is hurting everyone. The high cost of fuel, the high cost of groceries, even insurance rates are going up. So we are begging you if you have to make a choice between taking care of your family and giving to the GOP, please take care of your family. However, if you can spare it, we ask that you join our 15 for freedom program. That's \$15 a month for 15 months will help us get Republicans elected to the County Commission and the Board of Education here in New Hanover County. Put a Republican in the governor's seat and take back that white House. That's 15 for freedom at NewHanoverGop.org/15. Please consider joining us today. We need you.

Aubrey Tuell: And then I was in another board meeting and I heard not a lot of people caught this. It was at the very end of the meeting, one of the board members, who I wasn't expecting to ask this question, asked Doctor Foust. How long had you been planning to get rid of Mosley and implement this newcomers school? His answer 2021. We are now in the year of 2024, so that is at least two and a half years that he has been planning to get rid of this school. Why were we letting children and admitting children into this program, if we knew it was going to be getting rid of it. Wasn't just that the public found out about this, that he had been planning it since 2021. The Board of Education themselves found out at the same time the public did how long this had been planned. I think it's absolutely irresponsible for us to even speak about putting a newcomer center in New Hanover County when we are already facing, like I said, an \$11 million deficit in our own budget. And then we look at what's going on in our southern border and how many migrants are flowing every day across our border. It would be completely irresponsible for us to advertise a center, to bring in a whole group of population that are not taxpayers and are not going to be paying into the tax, the tax fund that funds our public education system. I do, however, want to preface I don't want to sound the wrong way. We do have an obligation to educate each student to their own capacity, regardless of their immigration status.

Reuel Sample: Oh, sure.

Aubrey Tuell: Yeah. I just don't necessarily agree with putting up a big billboard and advertising for all of them to come here.

Reuel Sample: Well, the the this whole Mosley School controversy is, is a bad on so many levels. It is the administration and the administration determining policy. And that's not what they're supposed to be doing. That's school board. But the other part of it is it really goes in the face of one of your core campaign values, is that Mosley School was opened to help students who can't do a traditional kind of education. It is a center of center of excellence, really, to, to help students who need to learn in different ways. Tell me more about that and why that's so important to your campaign.

Aubrey Tuell: I think what truly has made these Mosley students succeed in that environment and feel a part of something where they wouldn't have felt in their normal high school because I've heard them speak and some of them maybe it was an assault, maybe it was maybe it was behavior issues. There's a whole host of reasons why students ended up at Mosley. And I, they've spoken to this, and this is what I strongly advocate for, and it's built in my campaign platform. But they have a lot smaller class sizes. And something that I actually did when I was in school is I would go into classrooms. I was doing dual enrollment, and college classes don't go every day. And so during my blocks during the school day where I could have gone home, I could have gone somewhere else, I could have gone shopping or something like that. I went and served in a classroom, being an extra body in that classroom. I wasn't in the AIG honors classrooms. I was in a classroom where kids were struggling in school for a variety of reasons. And having an extra body in that classroom promoted accountability. grades went up, attendance went up, and behavioral issues decreased. That's proven success. That's what I'm talking about when I talk about things that we can do to promote academic opportunity and accountability for our students because so many of them are just wanting to be held accountable, whether they realize it or not. And that is something that makes a good, productive citizen. That is what the public education system is supposed to be doing, is preparing our students, educating our students, and preparing them to be successful citizens.

Reuel Sample: The other platform that you're talking about is school safety. And when parents send their kids off to school, they expect them to come home in more or less

the same shape that they sent them off. Are our schools safe and how can they be made safer?

Aubrey Tuell: I actually it breaks my heart to talk about this, but it's very real factor that people need to start talking about because for so many years it has not been talked about. I saw this happen firsthand when I was in school just five years ago. I was talking to a parent the other day and their child was brutally, brutally assaulted at their high school. They are facing hundreds, if not thousands of dollars in medical debt. In today's economy or in any economy, we cannot put our children in a school system where they were. We as families and as parents, could potentially be facing the fact of paying hundreds and thousands of dollars just because the school system did not provide a safe environment for our children. It broke my heart to talk to this parent about this, and she was really supportive of my campaign and just the fact that I was talking about school safety because so many campaigns don't talk about it, so many elected officials don't talk about it. And it is something that affects each and every student. When I was in school, we had at least one, at least one full time school resource officer. So school resource officers, for those of you who don't know they are actual police officers, that it's kind of like a job they take and they are stationed at a school. And so we would have a full time school resource officer and dog as well at my school during busy times. So arrival, dismissal lunch, we had multiple school resource officers on campus. And that was normal for us because when a child sees an authoritative figure that they know, okay, I can't do something right now, I can't start a fight or I can't do some type of bad behavior because they see an authoritative figure there.

Aubrey Tuell: It it's not it's very heavily decreased. And so that is proven to have positive results. Something else that my school system did where I grew up, this was really interesting. We have a pretty large retired population in Wilmington, and if my home district was able to master this, then I have no doubt that New Hanover County Schools and the residents of New Hanover County will be able to master this as well. But we would have volunteers come in from the community and they would stand in the hallways during class changes, because during class changes there's a lot of kids bumping into each other and stuff happens then. And so we would have hall monitors. They were essentially hall monitors. They would stand there and the children knew, and the students knew that they couldn't really do anything because there was someone there watching. Something else our school system did where I grew up, our teachers

would stand outside of their classrooms during class change just to put more bodies in the hallways, because hallways in general, especially during class change, get incredibly crowded. And so it's easy for something to happen. But having those extra bodies there that can stop an incident if it comes, if it arises, I think is super important. The parent I was talking to about their child who was brutally assaulted it took over a minute. This was in a cafeteria. It took over a minute for a staff member to get involved. That's absolutely irresponsible to. In my opinion. We should have, especially in those crowded places. We should have multiple staff members just looking, you know, just watching because we know that that those times are when violent or behavioral instances are more likely to occur.

Reuel Sample: It's it's important to point out that the Republican controlled legislature passed a budget that increased SROs across across the state. The Democrats have constantly opposed increasing SROs, basically policemen in schools. But one of the things that you're saying is that there there are policies that you're looking at that don't require a budget. I love the idea of bringing in folks from the community, retired dads who walk the halls and everything else. That's great.

Aubrey Tuell: Yeah. I mean, there are so many policy areas that don't cost us any money, but they heavily impact our students and our staff and our families. And so that's something that I have really tried to lean into during my campaign, because I know these things work. They're proven, and they don't need to cost the taxpayers a bunch of extra money just to get our children good results.

Reuel Sample: And an \$11 million shortfall it's policies that like that that will make our schools continue to work, but not cost us a penny.

Aubrey Tuell: Absolutely. I mean, we saw why we're even in this mess right now. We were putting ongoing expenses on one time funds I don't know about you Reuel, and I don't know about any of the listeners, but that's sure not how I manage my own finances. We need to get our own house in order before we start tacking on other expenses.

Reuel Sample: Let's talk about expenses in terms of accountability and parental involvement in schools. We said this over and over and over again, and the Democrats

don't seem to get this, is that parents are not a part of education, is that they are the essential part of education. How are you going to keep parents involved in their kids education, so that they can be assured that there is accountability from the NHC school board?

Aubrey Tuell: I think that's a really interesting question. And truthfully, we need to get parents more involved. Through a variety of avenues, whether it be volunteering, coming to different events. I was at the other week, I went to a program showcase for the whole county, and it was an amazing opportunity. They had elementary programs there. They had high school programs there, and it was just such a nice experience to get to see all these programs, see all of these parents interact with the staff members at these schools and really, truly get to hear exactly what those programs are. I think something that we could be doing better. In the school system, there are a lot of students. And another parent I was talking to their child doesn't necessarily exceed in the traditional school environment. And they never heard of Mosley as an option. And so they ended up pulling their child out of public school because it just wasn't working. So are we being transparent with our parents? Are we letting are we notifying them of all the options our school system does have? I think that's a good avenue that we could explore further.

Reuel Sample: You are running in a primary with five people running for three spots. The primaries are coming up. Why should Republicans choose you?

Aubrey Tuell: I love getting this question. But I think it's super important. Like I said earlier, we've had voices on our board, we've had parents. And I think that's absolutely phenomenal that parents have gotten involved and earned seats on the board. We've had former staff. And I think that's absolutely great that we have people with experience on these boards. But we're missing a voice on this board. We're missing the voice of someone that was just in the public education system, that is young, that is fresh with ideas, and can provide new solutions to old problems.

Reuel Sample: Before I give you the last word, how can people get in touch with you and support your campaign?

Aubrey Tuell: So for anyone that wants to get involved in the campaign, you can visit Aubreymforschools.com. You can visit. You can also visit my Instagram and Facebook accounts. They are [Aubreymtuellforschools](https://www.instagram.com/Aubreymtuellforschools). I would really appreciate the engagement there. Stay tuned. We will be having a few more events. I'm actually having an event. I just had one this past weekend and so I look forward to hopefully seeing you all at events soon.

Reuel Sample: I'm already seeing your signs up around town, so Aubrey's been out there already active. I'm going to give you the last word.

Aubrey Tuell: Well, thank you Reuel. First off, I just want to say thank you for having me on and thank you to everything that the party has done. I was the former secretary for the county party. And so I know the work that goes in from the county party. And I just want to thank you and thank all of the volunteers that make the wheels run. But I do just want to say I would really appreciate your support. If you'd like to donate, you can visit Aubreyforschools.com. If you'd like to volunteer, you can also visit my website. But I am looking forward when I'm elected to promoting academic opportunities, school safety, and accountability in our schools.

Reuel Sample: Early voting starts February 15th. After you recover from Valentine's Day, go to the polls. And the actual primary election day is March 5th. Aubrey Tuell, all the best. Thank you for joining us.

Aubrey Tuell: Thank you. Reuel.