

**Triad City Beat Questionnaire: David Coates**  
**Candidate for Guilford County School Board, District 3**

**FOR ALL CANDIDATES**

**A. What is your background in politics? If you are an incumbent, please state which offices you have held and when.**

a) I have never run for public office before. I have been supportive of various Democratic candidates in the past monetarily and canvassing.

**B. Why were you drawn to run for office?**

b) I was a school board attorney for my entire legal career. As such, I dealt with a wide variety of legal issues affecting all aspects of public education. I was also co-lead counsel in various state constitutional challenges to the method of funding public education in New Jersey. I found the work to be very interesting. In retirement, I want to use what I have learned to promote quality educational experiences for all of our children in Guilford County.

**C. If you had to pick three issues (housing, economy, schools, policing, etc), which three issues would you say are the most important to you?**

c) Three issues of most importance to me are  
i) Physical and emotional safety of students and staff;  
ii) Attractive pay for teachers and staff;  
iii) Accountability for Student Achievement.

**D. If elected, how would you work with fellow representatives on the other side of the political aisle?**

d) There should be no political division on school boards when it comes to providing quality education to students. Unfortunately, our society has been divided into two camps. I would approach my fellow board members collegially and work on the assumption that we all want the best for all of our students, and work with them when possible. There are issues on which there will be disagreement. If these issues impact the educational experience, I will speak out in clear and unmistakable language. Saying that, I think it important that we recognize the humanity of all people and work to persuade people when possible and refrain from language that needlessly exacerbates differences.

**E. What do you see as the role of the office you seek?**

e) The Board's role is to:  
i) Provide oversight of all district functions. This is accomplished through the Superintendent of Schools . The Board's role is not to manage the schools. Its job is to see the schools are well managed. This requires continual oversight.  
ii) Evaluation of the Superintendent is central to the Board's role as the Superintendent is responsible for managing all the varied aspects of a school

district, for example: personnel, transportation, curriculum, special educational, ect.

- iii) Oversight and evaluation form the basis for goal setting with appropriate methods for determining the attainment of the goal within the prescribed time.
- iv) Policy. This has two prongs, a philosophical understanding of the role of schools and detailed guides to official action in accord with applicable law and regulation.
- v) Advocacy is an especially important function now. We have a nationwide and statewide teacher shortage, which is not being addressed by the North Carolina General Assembly. This needs to change and advocacy is, therefore, a very important Board function. The Board has no taxing authority. It is dependent on funding from the General Assembly, County Commissioners and the Federal Government. When one or more of these is AWOL it needs to be clearly called out. This statement is illustrative. There are other areas where advocacy is called for.

**F. Which city do you live in and what are three favorite things about it?**

- f) I live in Greensboro. The restaurants, the Carolina Theater, and the people I have met interact with.

**FOR SCHOOL BOARD**

**A. State representatives have been working to expand school vouchers. Are you in support or against these programs? Why or why not?**

- a) I am adamantly opposed to private school vouchers. The General Assembly has a state constitutional responsibility for our public schools. It is failing in that responsibility as per our Supreme Court's ruling in Leandro in 2022. It has a statutory responsibility for the provision of teacher pay. North Carolina is 45<sup>th</sup> in the nation in new teacher pay, not a place of honor. The state is running a surplus, but clearly the General Assembly is no friend to our schools. The private school voucher program is, in my opinion, a disgrace. Private schools are just that – private. If a parent wants their child in a private school that is their choice, but it comes with the duty to pay for that school. This program besides being a waste of taxpayer money is a direct assault on public education and no amount of verbal eyewash can change that basic fact.

**B. What is your opinion on cell phones in schools?**

- b) I think cell phones should be deposited in a box at the start of each class and picked up at the end.

**C. The issue of safety in schools is at the tops of many parents', students' and teachers' minds. How would you prioritize school safety?**

- c) I would prioritize school safety this way:

- i) Approximately 8% of our students have chronic conditions e.g. asthma, Type 1 diabetes, peanut allergies. Unexpected injuries occur. There needs to be a qualified school nurse in every school. Telemedicine alone, in my opinion, is a diversion from what is necessary for the safety of students and staff.
- ii) We need to advocate for the banning of semiautomatic weapons, red flag laws, stringent background checks for gun buyers, and holding parent's criminally and financially responsible for their children's terroristic acts if parental duties of oversight and use of good judgment has been neglected. Schools will not be as safe as they should be as long as our society values guns more than people.
- iii) Have periodic security reviews in each school to see that windows are appropriately locked and doors not in use are locked. All doors in use should be monitored by a responsible adult who will lock the door at the first sign of a threat posed by an attempted entry. Hardened doors and other appropriate architectural features should be utilized to limit intruder access to schools.

**D. Related to that, do you support the inclusion of more police officers in schools? What about metal detectors?**

- d) Nationwide and here in Guilford County we have a significant problem of absenteeism. Schools should not feel like prisons, and if they do, some students will add this to their list of anxieties. I would have to get more information as to the efficacy of metal detectors before I would support them in schools. I am skeptical as to whether the presence of a police officer in the schools works to prevent school shootings. The experience elsewhere would indicate that this strategy does not prove effective. It may be that the presence that a police officer has a deterrent effect, but it also may be that the introduction of a firearm into the school setting is counter productive. I would like to see studies and data that either support my skepticism or refute it before I take a stand.

**E. The issue of book challenges and book bans has been rising across the country. Can you talk about your philosophy on restricting certain materials in schools?**

- e) I like the following Sidney J. Harris quote; “The whole purpose of education is to turn mirrors into windows” Of course reading material should be age appropriate, but that should never be a reason for censorship. There should be a variety of literature in libraries. Children need to see that there is a wider world which encompasses different ideas and modes of living. We should not assume any one viewpoint is correct, but offer a multitude of reading choices to our children so they can understand the world they are entering and see themselves.

**F. The issues of trans, and other LGBTQ+ students in schools has also become increasingly politicized. Can you talk about your philosophy in terms of LGBTQ+ rights in schools?**

- f) During the pandemic 50% of gay and transgender students had a suicide plan as opposed to 15% of all students. The fact that any student would have such a plan is tragic. The fact that our gay and trans children have had such plans in such a high percentage is an indictment of the hate and callousness that exists in society. All children should be welcome in schools and no child should ever be bullied or made to feel ashamed or afraid because of their identity.

**G. Do you support tax increases to support school infrastructure or teacher pay?**

f) I am in favor of the ballot initiative for a very small and very selective sales tax increase to support increased teacher pay. The state of North Carolina is running a surplus. If the private school voucher program was terminated and the money used for public teacher pay and the surplus used judiciously, Guilford County Schools would be in a stronger position to attract and retain teachers and meet other pressing needs. At the school level, I note that Wake County has somewhat higher local taxes, but it does not seem to have hurt the community. The increased revenue stream has strengthened their school system.

**H. What are parents' roles, if any, in shaping school curriculum?**

h) I believe that parental involvement in their children's education is the most important factor in a child's success. It starts with reading to very young children, talking to them in sentences at a very young age, providing enrichment activities like going to the Science Center or a zoo and continues in providing more advanced reading material at home, monitoring homework, attending back to school nights and teacher conferences. I think parents have a role in demanding rigor in school curriculum, advocating for more varied curriculum to meet the needs of our varied student body, but I do not believe and they have a role in the nitty gritty work of curriculum development.