

# District school board candidates square off

## Lou Ann Evans: Incumbent

State College Area School District is recognized at the state and national level for its excellence in public education. Our achievements are a result of the dedication of teachers, staff, administrators, and school board members to the children and youth in the Centre Region. The quality of education that we provide benefits the whole community by helping to attract businesses and professionals to our area, which contribute to the stability of our economy, property values, and quality of life.

My reasons for running for school board are the same today as in 1997—to prepare our youth to be productive adults who will contribute to the future of our nation. Through my service as a school director, I have the privilege of contributing to the future of our youth, community and nation.

In addition to serving on the local board, I am also serving as 2005 president-elect of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association. This work gives State College a voice in Harrisburg and Washington. For example, I worked with our local legislators in Harrisburg to eliminate the Occupational Assessment Tax, and testified before House Committees regarding property taxes, public school funding and charter school funding. For the Pennsylvania School Boards Association, I served as County Legislative Coordinator, 2005 Chair of Legislative Platform Committee and Chair of the Legislative Policy Council. I participated in the National School Boards Association Federal Network Relations in Washington D.C., lobbying for improvements to the No Child Left Behind legislation. And this past spring I appeared on WPSX to discuss the pros and cons of Act 72.

Legislative advocacy is a strength I bring to the board, and I look forward to the opportunity to address the issues of property tax relief, adequate funding for public schools, escalating medical costs, unfunded mandates, and No Child Left Behind, all of which impact our local taxes. Our district budget priorities continue to be funding special education, technology, professional development, staff benefits, charter schools, other unfunded mandates, and facilities. The high school is our current project, which includes updating the facility and implementing the Small Schools

Initiative. Facilities will continue to be a driver in future budgets as we update six elementary buildings, Fairmount, and central offices. State and federal mandates continue to dictate how our resources are spent, thus limiting flexibility to target dollars where we need them locally. We must continue to work on these issues with our legislators.

School boards and state legislators continue to debate the pros and cons of Act 72. Act 72 addresses the issue of reducing property taxes, but neglects to address the equally important issue of adequate funding for public education in Pennsylvania. School boards must evaluate all proposed property tax relief legislation from the perspectives of tax payers and the ability of our district to meet the needs of students as mandated by No Child Left Behind. For school directors, the two issues are inseparable and I will continue to work for property tax relief that addresses both.

## David Hutchinson: Incumbent

I consider public education to be an important civic responsibility, and a great opportunity to serve our community. My two years on the school board have been fascinating, challenging and rewarding, and I believe that I've made a positive contribution.

In the strategic plan for the State College Area School District, there is an almost poetic description of what we want to see in our high school graduates. These qualities go well beyond the current obsession with test scores, and are better preparation for the future. I hope to help to create the kind of environment that will allow our students to become:

- Responsible and involved citizens;
- Clear and effective communicators;
- Competent problem solvers who think critically;
- Productive individuals who work independently;
- Those who demonstrate respect for themselves and others;
- Users of evolving technologies;
- Knowledgeable practitioners of wellness behaviors;
- Informed consumers;

■ Responsible stewards of the environment;

■ Participants in the arts.

Preparing our students for citizenship is an important part of this mission. If we expect our graduates to become active citizens, we should look to engage them in the decisions that affect their lives. For a number of years I have been actively involved with the National Issues Forum; one of our most popular high school courses is based on this model.

These forums provide the opportunity for in-depth discussions of important issues, and require that participants "think through" the consequences of the possible courses of action.

Within the next four years, we expect to see the completion of a substantially renovated, technologically modern, and ecologically responsible high school that integrates our two current buildings into one campus. This campus design was substantially impacted by the input that we received from community members and the high school staff and faculty. It is important that we do this in a way that is fiscally responsible, so that we will be able to complete essential renovations that have been scheduled for the district's remaining buildings.

For the past several years, first as a parent, and then as a school board member, I have been on the "small schools" committee. In conjunction with the building renovation, a series of small learning communities will be established at the high school. This initiative will create opportunities for greater faculty collaboration and creativity, as well as stronger and more personal connections between faculty members and individual students, without affecting the quality of curriculum choices.

Nearly every educator is concerned about Pennsylvania's reliance on the property tax as the primary source of funding for public education.

Unfortunately, Act 72 was a poorly written piece of legislation, and we are fortunate that our community recognized that it would not serve the interests of our schools. The political reality is that property taxes cannot be reduced until our state Legislature accepts its constitutional obligation towards the financing of the public school system, and I am supportive of any legislator who is willing to consider alternatives to the property tax.

## Gowen Roper: Democrat Challenger

My parents were school teachers, and I strongly believe in the importance of public education in our society. Public schools provide the children of our community the opportunity to learn the skills that will allow them to become successful adults and the values necessary to live in an increasingly diverse world. I am running for the State College Area School Board because I believe that our public schools will face serious challenges and decisions in the coming years. I believe that it is important that those decisions are made by people who respect and value the public schools and the teachers that work there.

We need real property tax reform. However, until the state legislature provides it, the school board will be faced with difficult financial choices. It has to deal with decreased state funding, increased unfunded mandates from both the state and federal governments and the rising costs of health care, energy and construction projects. It will be a challenge to develop responsible budgets in this economic environment. I am committed to working to find the right balance between what the community can afford and what maintains the quality of our educational programs.

I believe that the SCASD board also needs to continue to work with the school administration to develop the integrity and excellence of our educational programs. If we are going to prepare our children for the rapidly changing world that they will live in, we need to reduce the student-teacher ratio when possible, and to empower our teachers to "teach beyond the tests." We need to open our children's minds, not close them, by providing them the best possible experiences in both the arts and the sciences. We need to support our teachers in developing the best practices in science and math and to expand our use of technology in teaching.

Finally we need to ensure that all our children have the opportunity to learn no matter what their background or ability. We need to teach our children to respect and value diversity and to provide them with a safe learning environment. As a clinical psychologist I have spent my professional career listening to people and helping them solve the problems that they are facing in their lives. I have had two children graduate from the SCASD. I believe that I have the skills and the values needed to help lead the SCASD at this time. I believe that I can provide the kind of thoughtful, progressive and forward looking leadership that can insure that our schools educate our children to succeed in the ever changing world in which we live.