

2026 Polk County School Board Seat 3

Surveys were sent on June 13 and all candidate responses were received prior to June 30. This document was published July 4, 2026.
There are three candidates in this race. Kate Wallace's answers will be on a separate page for some questions.
Prepared by Citizens Support Services Lake Wales.

1. What is your background? Why are you running for school board now, and what are your qualifications?

Sarah Corona



My background is rooted in community service, faith-based involvement, and nonprofit work. I have supported my church and various nonprofit organizations through volunteer service and financial contributions. I have also participated in missionary work serving communities in need. Professionally and through community work, I have helped develop programs and support the creation of nonprofits, particularly focused on mental health services. I am running for school board because I believe strong schools are the foundation of a strong community. My qualifications come from leadership in community service, program development, and a focus on practical problem-solving and mental health advocacy.

Victor Sims



I grew up in foster care and attended multiple schools before graduating from a Polk County public school. Along the way, I experienced both the challenges and opportunities our education system can provide. At different points, I received Exceptional Student Education services, and later I was placed in gifted programs. Because of that, I've seen our schools from multiple perspectives and understand that every child learns differently.

Education changed the trajectory of my life. It opened doors that eventually led me to earn degrees in psychology, business, and law. Today, I serve as a chief executive officer and have spent my entire professional career working to improve outcomes for children and families.

I'm running for School Board because I believe my experiences give me a unique perspective. I've been the student who needed extra support, the student who excelled when given opportunities, the child navigating instability at home, and now the executive responsible for leading organizations and managing budgets. I understand the importance of academic excellence, fiscal responsibility, and ensuring every student has the resources they need to succeed.

Most importantly, I know firsthand that one caring teacher, one mentor, or one opportunity can change a child's life. Mine certainly did. That's why I'm running—to make sure every child in Polk County has the same chance to succeed that I was given.

1. What is your background (family and professional)? Why are you running for school board now, and what are your qualifications?

Kate Wallace



First, I am proud to be the incumbent in this race because Gov. DeSantis appointed me to the seat in Nov. of 2025 after Rick Nolte passed away. As for my background, I'm a government relations professional with more than 20 years of experience at the local, state, and federal level advocating for pro-business, profamily, and pro-education-opportunity policies. Currently I'm a local government liaison for Spectrum, working to expand broadband access to underserved rural households across Polk and 12 other Florida counties, including nearly 11,000 households in Polk County alone. Before that, I spent over a decade advancing school choice, career and technical education, early literacy, and higher academic standards at the state and local levels, through roles with Gov. Jeb Bush's Foundation for Excellence in Education in Tallahassee and as founding executive director of Lakeland Leads (now ConnectEd Polk), where I helped bring IDEA Public Schools and Junior Achievement's 3DE program to Polk County. I'm a Bartow native, the third child of Howe and Jenny Wallace. My dad founded PalletOne in Bartow, and my mom is a retired Polk State nursing instructor. I grew up in a Christian home shaped by Luke 12:48: "to whom much is given, much is required." I attended PCPS schools K-12, graduated from Bartow IB, and earned my public relations degree at the University of Florida, launching my government relations career through internships on Capitol Hill and at the White House. I'm running because our district still ranks 55th of 67 counties in student achievement and fewer than half our students graduate ready for college or career — an unsustainable trajectory I believe demands urgency, not excuses, and I'm committed to providing the leadership to change that course and put Polk County students on a path toward real academic excellence.

2. What service organizations do you support with your time and money?

Sarah Corona



I support my church and several nonprofit organizations through both volunteer service and financial contributions. I have participated in missionary work and community outreach focused on helping individuals and families in need. I have also helped create and support nonprofit programs, especially in the area of mental health. These efforts focus on increasing access to services and reducing stigma. My involvement is centered on improving the well-being of the community. I remain committed to service through both direct action and organizational support.

Victor Sims



NAACP, Foster Club, National Foster Youth and Alumni Policy Council, American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law, Lakeland Youth Alliance, Lakeland PAL.

Kate Wallace



As a Christian, I believe in being radically generous and donating my time and talent to the church and charity, which for me is my hometown church of First Presbyterian Church of Bartow along with several congregations and ministries from my present and past. Since being appointed, I donated \$10,000 of my school board salary to the Polk Education Foundation, distributed as \$500 grants to all 20 District 3 campuses. I serve as a Community Investment Team member and donor with United Way of Central Florida, and I support the Junior Leagues of Greater Lakeland and Florida, IDEA Public Schools, VISTE, Gospel Inc. of Lakeland, and Academy Prep of Lakeland, the University of Florida Alumni Association, and frequently make one-time gifts to various causes and fundraising events every year. I also mentor students directly, one of whom I helped earn a spot at American Legion Boys State and as a page in the Florida Senate during the 2026 session.

3. What do you feel are the 2 most critical issues that need to be addressed as a board member? What do you believe are the most important challenges/priorities facing Polk County and the School Board?

Sarah Corona



The two most critical issues are student academic achievement and student mental health and well-being. Many students need stronger foundational skills in reading, math, and critical thinking. At the same time, schools are seeing increased behavioral and mental health challenges that affect learning. Addressing both academics and student well-being must go hand in hand. Long-term challenges also include teacher retention, school safety, and closing achievement gaps. These issues require consistent focus and practical, student-centered solutions.

Victor Sims



Nothing affects student outcomes more consistently than having excellent adults in schools. Polk County, like many districts, faces challenges with teacher shortages, staff retention, burnout, and competition from neighboring districts and the private sector. Polk County is one of Florida's fastest-growing areas which I believe we have to continue to strategically plan for.

Kate Wallace



The two most critical issues are academic performance, specifically growing the number of A-rated schools and programs and improving our statewide standing, and figuring out how to achieve that within current funding, policy, and structural constraints. We want to pay our people more, recruit and retain top talent, and address hundreds of millions of dollars in unfunded maintenance and capital needs, but our current revenues don't support that. We are also facing increasing competitive pressure from nontraditional public and private providers, meaning the best way to retain and grow student enrollment and earn parents' trust is to focus on excellence. I am committed to improving and evolving our strategic plan to reflect those objectives, always within our means and within the bounds of state and federal law.

4. How do you view Tallahassee’s involvement in our local community? “overreach” or “necessary support”? Why do you take this view?

Sarah Corona



I view state involvement as both necessary support and a potential limitation on local flexibility. The state plays an important role in providing funding, setting standards, and ensuring accountability. However, local school boards should retain the ability to make decisions based on community needs. Education is most effective when local leaders can respond directly to students, parents, and teachers. A balanced approach is best, where the state supports without overstepping local decision-making. Collaboration between state and local leadership is essential.

Victor Sims



My opponent often looks to Tallahassee for answers. I look to Polk County. I trust our teachers, parents, students, and community members to identify our challenges and help build solutions. State government can be a valuable partner, but I don't believe every local problem requires a Tallahassee solution.

Kate Wallace



Tallahassee’s role in education is a necessary check, not overreach in principle. The state is constitutionally obligated to ensure equitable funding between wealthy and poor districts, set academic standards, and prevent any child from being disadvantaged simply by their zip code or local incompetence. I’ve seen examples of state overreach but also cases where state intervention was warranted because a district failed its duties. Given how much education policy is set in Tallahassee, I’m the board’s most experienced voice in state K-12 policy, and I intend to keep using that experience and those relationships to fight for more funding and push back against overreach when it happens.

5. What are your views on school choice? What are your views on the competing components of choosing a school?

Sarah Corona



I strongly support school choice and believe parents should decide the best educational setting for their children. Every child learns differently and has unique needs. Public, charter, private, and religious schools all provide valuable options for families. These systems should be viewed as different pathways rather than competition. Parents are best positioned to make educational decisions for their children. All schools should maintain high standards of accountability and student safety

Victor Sims



I believe families should absolutely have the freedom to choose the educational setting that best fits their child that can be a traditional public school, magnet school, public charter school, private charter school, private school, homeschool, or a faith-based option. No one path works for every student, and parents know their children best.

Where I think we have to be careful is not in the idea of choice, but in how we design and oversee the systems that support is especially voucher programs. If public dollars are being used, then there should be clear expectations for transparency, student outcomes, and accountability. Right now, that's where I see gaps that we need to address more directly.

I don't think the goal is to limit choice it's to make sure that whatever option a family selects, it is safe, high-quality, and held to standards that protect students and taxpayers. Real choice only works when families can actually trust the options in front of them.

5. What are your views on school choice? What are your views on the competing components of choosing a school?

Kate Wallace



I'm a fierce champion of parental rights and every family's freedom to choose the educational option that's right for their child — whether that's a neighborhood public school, magnet program, charter, career academy, virtual program, private or religious school, or home education. No family's zip code or income should limit those options. I'll actively work to recruit and grow high-quality options of every type in Polk County, because competition makes every school better and empowered parents make every community stronger. And specific to Lake Wales, this means being a valued partner with Lake Wales Charter Schools in addition to championing the Lake Wales-area campuses the district oversees and operates. This isn't theoretical for me: I helped attract IDEA Public Schools, a nationally recognized charter network now serving over 700 first-generation college-bound students in Lakeland, and I've spent years advancing public and private school choice policy statewide through my work with the Foundation for Excellence in Education. As a board member, my role isn't to pick winners between public, charter, and private; it's to make sure every family in District 3 and across Polk County has real options, especially the families currently sitting on waiting lists for our best magnet, charter, and private programs.

6. What are your views on the school grading system?

Sarah Corona



The school grading system is a useful tool for accountability and measuring academic performance. However, it does not fully capture a student's growth, creativity, or individual progress. Grades should be one of several measures used to evaluate success. Students learn in different ways and should be assessed through multiple methods. This includes projects, participation, and skill development. A balanced approach provides a more complete picture of student achievement.

Victor Sims



I believe accountability matters, and parents deserve clear information about how schools are performing. However, I also believe our current school grading system can sometimes do more harm than good. Reducing a school to a single letter grade doesn't always capture the challenges, successes, and growth happening inside that building.

When a school receives a low grade, it can affect staff morale, community perception, student enrollment, and even property values. The schools serving our highest-needs students often face the greatest obstacles, yet they're judged by the same simplified measure.

Rather than focusing solely on a letter grade, I would like to see greater emphasis on student growth, school climate, workforce and career readiness, attendance, and other indicators that provide a more complete picture of school success. Our goal should be to support continuous improvement, not label schools in ways that discourage the very communities we're trying to help.

6. What are your views on the school grading system?

Kate Wallace



While no school accountability system is perfect, I'm a strong supporter of A-F school grading for four reasons: it's clear and easy for the public to understand, unlike vaguer rating systems other states use; it tells parents and stakeholders plainly which schools are excelling and which need help; it provides critical accountability guardrails for our most vulnerable communities; and if you don't measure, you don't care. School grades do not reveal the entire picture of a school's quality, but they serve an important function of ensuring the adults in the system focus on student outcomes. Also, since Florida adopted A-F school grading in 1999, core subject proficiency and graduation rates have risen dramatically, and schools across the state that had historically been ignored or unfairly served by districts finally received the attention and resources they deserved, all in the name of improving school grades. Polk County has seen plenty examples of these sorts of interventions. In fact, I'd be surprised if initial local school grades from 1999-2002 also were not a key factor in Lake Wales' decision to launch a city-wide charter school system. Moving forward, there are a couple of improvements I would like to advocate for the Florida Department of Education to consider in its school grading approach, but overall, protecting the effectiveness and fidelity of A-F school grading requires the state to set clear, high, and consistent standards that are transparent and well-understood by educators and the general public alike.

7. How will you address the different needs of all students?

Sarah Corona



Every student has different learning needs, and schools must be equipped to meet them. This includes support for students with disabilities, gifted learners, English language learners, and students facing mental health or personal challenges. Teachers need training, resources, and support to differentiate instruction effectively. Strong support services such as counseling and intervention programs are essential. Families should also be active partners in their child's education. The goal is to ensure every student has the opportunity to succeed.

Victor Sims



Using data to identify achievement gaps and monitor student outcomes. Providing appropriate services for students with disabilities and other specialized learning needs. Expanding academic supports such as tutoring, mentoring, and intervention programs.

Kate Wallace



I've already helped launch projects that are tangibly benefiting Polk County families today: IDEA Public Schools – Lakeland, serving over 700 first-generation college-bound students; Junior Achievement's 3DE program at Tenoroc High School; and assisting with the launch of the Barnett Discovery Center, opening November 2026, through my past role at Lakeland Leads and through my current role at Spectrum, which donated \$50,000 to the project. Beyond these flagship initiatives, I support expanding access to magnet programs, career academies, ESE services, and accelerated coursework so every student, whether gifted, career-bound, or in need of additional support, has a path tailored to their needs, not a one-size-fits-all approach.

8. What are your views on educator salaries and benefits?

Sarah Corona



Educators should be fairly compensated for the important work they do. Competitive salaries are essential for attracting and retaining quality teachers. Teacher turnover and shortages directly impact student learning. In addition to pay, strong benefits such as healthcare and retirement security are important. Professional development opportunities should also be supported. Investing in educators is investing in student success.

Victor Sims



Our staff do not get paid enough. Every day, teachers, paraprofessionals, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, custodians, secretaries, and support staff help make our schools successful, yet many struggle to keep up with the rising cost of living. We cannot expect to attract and retain great employees if compensation is not competitive. I believe investing in our people is one of the most important investments we can make in student success. One opportunity worth exploring is solar energy. If implemented responsibly and shown to provide long-term cost savings, those savings could help reduce operating expenses and allow more dollars to be directed toward our teachers, support staff, and student needs.

Kate Wallace



Like most anyone else, I believe we need to pay great teachers and staff more, but pay raises alone won't fix the underlying problem. We first need to reform how we structure pay, advancement, and retention. Right now, our system advances and pays people largely on tenure rather than performance or impact, which makes it hard to reward our best teachers and hardest classroom assignments appropriately. I want to make the tough operational decisions necessary to streamline our district's structure, so more dollars flow out of central administration and into competitive pay, with real autonomy and support for the teachers doing the most difficult work.

9. What are your budget priorities?

Sarah Corona



My budget priorities focus on students first. This includes competitive teacher salaries and strong classroom support staff. I also prioritize student services such as counseling, special education, and mental health support. Safe and well-maintained school facilities are essential for learning. Resources should be directed to areas that directly impact student achievement. Budgets should also be transparent and responsibly managed.

Victor Sims



In addition to focusing on responsible spending, there are also opportunities to strengthen our budget through thoughtful revenue and cost strategies. That includes expanding access to additional course offerings through programs like Step Up for Students, particularly in high-interest electives and career-focused areas, where appropriate. It also includes exploring long-term cost reductions, such as solar energy on school facilities, if analysis shows it can reduce operating expenses over time. The goal is to create more flexibility in the budget so more resources can be directed toward classrooms, staff, and student support.

Kate Wallace



The two most critical issues are academic performance — specifically growing the number of A-rated schools and programs and improving our statewide standing — and figuring out how to achieve that within current funding, policy, and structural constraints. (By the way, this is why A+ is in my campaign logo!). We want to pay our people more, recruit and retain top talent, and address hundreds of millions of dollars in unfunded maintenance and capital needs, but our current revenues and budget picture don't support that. I believe the answer isn't raising taxes, but spending smarter through streamlining how the district operates, cutting through bureaucratic layers, and redirecting dollars out of inefficient processes and into the classroom and teacher pay, where they make the greatest difference for students.

10. Why should citizens vote for you specifically instead of your opponent(s)?

Sarah Corona



Citizens should vote for me because I am a pragmatic, service-driven leader focused on results. My decisions are guided by what is best for students and families, not politics. I am committed to accountability, integrity, and practical solutions. My background in community service and nonprofit work gives me a real understanding of local needs. I focus on outcomes rather than rhetoric. My goal is to serve the community with consistent, thoughtful action.

Victor Sims



One candidate brings strong educational credentials and executive leadership experience. Another brings valuable policy and governmental experience. I bring both. Throughout my career, I have worked with state legislators, collaborated with leaders across the last four presidential administrations, and developed the leadership, policy, and strategic skills necessary to govern effectively.

What truly sets me apart, however, is my lifelong commitment to children. I am the only candidate in this race who has spent an entire professional career working to improve outcomes for children and families. Whether through child welfare, education advocacy, philanthropy, or public policy, my work has always centered on helping young people succeed.

I also bring a perspective that is both personal and forward-looking. As someone who benefited from Polk County's public schools despite significant challenges growing up, I understand firsthand how transformative education can be. And as the only candidate whose children will soon enter our public school system during my first term, I have a direct personal stake in ensuring our schools are preparing every child for success. The decisions we make today will affect not only current students but also the next generation including my own family.

Voters should choose me because I offer the leadership experience, policy expertise, and lifelong commitment to children necessary to move our district forward. I will bring both professional expertise and personal investment to every decision I make on behalf of Polk County's students, families, teachers, and taxpayers.

10. Why should citizens vote for you specifically instead of your opponent(s)?

Kate Wallace



I'm the most qualified and experienced candidate in this race, with a proven and extensive track record across business, nonprofit, and public sectors, and now, board governance, as I'll have a full year of board service by the time this term's winner takes office. Governor DeSantis appointed me not only because of my qualifications but also because I had the most sterling reputation among his most trusted Polk County partners and legislators. I've visited more than 25 PCPS campuses, including 19 in District 3 in the last year. As a Polk native, my values are Polk County's values: low taxes, robust school choice for parents, high expectations for all students, and keeping students safe in partnership with local law enforcement. I'm proud to be a lifelong conservative Republican, and I don't attempt to hide my values or deceive any groups or constituencies on the campaign trail. No other candidate in this race has stronger relationships with the state lawmakers, state Department of Education officials, and executive branch leaders who set our budget and policy. If you want a board member who can move the needle in Tallahassee and at home, I am the clear choice.

11. Where can people get more information about you and/or your campaign?

Sarah Corona



More information about my campaign is available through my official website and social media pages Sarah Corona for Polk County School Board district 3. These platforms share updates, priorities, and community engagement efforts. I also attend local meetings and events to speak directly with residents. I welcome open communication with parents, teachers, and community members. Engagement and transparency are important to me. I encourage people to reach out and stay involved.

Victor Sims



They can go to www.simsforpolk.com they can reach out to me at my number 863-259-9424 or they can email my campaign at leadership@simsforpolk.com

Kate Wallace



Visit www.kateforkids.com or my campaign's Facebook page, facebook.com/kateforkidsfl. I also advise pulling up candidate campaign contribution reports on the Polk County Supervisor of Elections website, which showcase my broad base of support. As of June, I've served on the board for seven months. Watch how I conduct myself at a work session or board meeting on PCPS' YouTube page, or ask a fellow board member about who I am or what it's been like to work with me, as all of them have known me for years as a local education advocate and business leader. Ask Congressman Franklin, any Polk County state legislative delegation member, Sheriff Judd, our county constitutional officers, or their staff members what they think of me. You can also find me on LinkedIn at linkedin.com/in/katewallaceuf, or email me directly at kate@kateforkids.com.