

12 register to run for school board

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By Blair Ames

A crowded field of 12 candidates has developed to compete for three open seats on the Frederick County Board of Education.

Board incumbents Donna Crook and Katie Groth will be joined by 10 newcomers in the election: Zakir Bengali, Tony Chmelik, Colleen Cusimano, Kiesha La Kay Edmonds, Jim Hoover, Emily Ann Meyer, Cindy Rose, Joy Schaefer, Tom Shade and Pam Ward.

Angie Fish has said she will not seek another term on the school board when her term expires this year.

The field will be whittled down to six candidates through the April 3 primary for the Nov. 6 general election, according to Stuart Harvey, director of the Frederick County Board of Elections.

Crook, who is entering her 10th year on the board, said she's running for a seat because there is still more work to be done, including improving the passing rates of special education students.

Crook said she is a qualified candidate because of her dedication, experience, knowledge of the school system and devotion to the required time commitment.

She also said she has a valued stake in her work with her children attending Frederick County schools.

"I'm not using this as a steppingstone for a future political career," she said. "I'm doing this because I care about the kids."

Groth has served on the board since being appointed in 2004.

With another term, Groth said she'd like to focus not only on "renovating" Frederick High School but also updating conveniences and technology in all high schools.

"I believe all of our kids should have a fair, equal opportunity to get the best education possible," she said.

Bengali is traveling in India visiting his mother and could not be reached for comment.

Chmelik said he is happy with the current board but believes they can do more to reform math, social studies and history curriculums across the board.

"I am an education reformer," he said. "I'd like to see the members (of the board) doing more to help the school system improve itself."

The Ijamsville resident ran unsuccessfully for the school board in 2008.

Cusimano, also an Ijamsville resident, has three priorities in her campaign: improve fiscal responsibility, empower parents to be a voice for their children's education, and request that staff present opposing views on programs so the board can see all sides of any issue.

"My No. 1 concern is that we need to put the kids' interest first," she said.

Cusimano also unsuccessfully ran for the board in 2010. She finished fifth.

Edmonds could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

Hoover, an Emmitsburg resident and former mayor of the town, said he is running for school board because he likes and wants to be involved in governmental processes.

He said there isn't one particular issue he's interested in pursuing, but prefers a well-rounded approach involving construction, curriculum and finances.

"I don't have any particular agenda," he said. "I think it's important more to be involved with the whole, kind of big picture."

Meyer, a Frederick resident and study director at the National Academies in Washington, is running because she said it was time to step up to the plate and participate rather than talking about it.

"I'm running for school board because I would like to have a voice in the educational system, founded on the belief that a strong public school system is necessary to ensure that Frederick County remains vibrant and competitive in the years to come," she said in an email.

Rose, a Knoxville resident, said she's running for a seat because of curriculum concerns, mainly on the elementary level.

"I'd like our students to be taught more rigorous history and math," she said.

Rose brought her curriculum concerns to the attention of the board this summer in regards to the textbook "Social Studies Alive: Our Community and Beyond."

Rose has two children enrolled at FCPS as well as two FCPS graduates.

Spring Ridge resident Joy Schaefer, who has three children enrolled in FCPS, said she registered to be a candidate because of her passion for public education.

"Strong public schools contribute to building strong communities," Schaefer said.

Schaefer gained experience in public education while working with the Foreign Policy Institution, where she educated everyone from public school students to adults participating in Institute for Learning in Retirement programs on international policy.

Shade, a Frederick resident, has 29 years of experience as a teacher and school administrator and has worked with seven Frederick County schools throughout his career.

"I loved working with teachers and parents and their children," he said.

After retiring 15 years ago for health concerns and to spend more time with his children and grandchildren, Shade is looking to become more involved with the school system again.

"It's just something that I would enjoy being a part of, and I think I still have some things to offer," he said.

Since his retirement, Shade has worked for FCPS on a part-time basis, including projects involved with determining the correct number of portables for overcrowded schools.

Ward has been a certified secondary math teacher for 21 years. The New Market resident is in her third year at Frederick Community College as a part-time math teacher.

She hopes to bring her educational experience to the board, which includes stints at schools with high minority populations to schools with students from low-income families to private schools.

"I absolutely love teaching, I always have," Ward said.

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