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## Resident calls for School Board candidates

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**PUBLISHER'S NOTE:** The following column is by Jerry Lawrence of Levy County. In this article, he presents facts and his opinion to show people why they may be concerned about the condition of the Levy County School District, as well as sharing an idea that people may want to run for the three School Board seats that are currently up for election. He notes that the time to collect petitions to run is gone; however, he notes the actual cost to pay to qualify to run in these races.

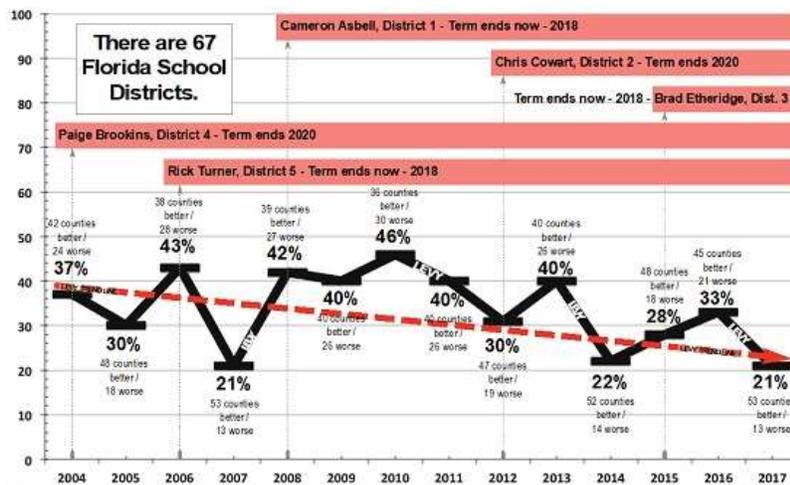
### Dear Citizens of Levy County,

I want to share some important information with you about this year's midterm elections, when three Levy County school board seats are up for grabs. I want to share with you why you should be concerned, and I want to share with each one of you what you can do, starting today, to improve the quality of education of our students.

### Why should you be concerned?

We are in a state of urgency; our students need you now. For the last 15 years, Levy

2004 - 2017 Levy County School Board Report Card and Length of Time on School Board



County has ranked in the bottom of Florida's 67 counties when it comes to equipping our children to read and write, to perform basic math and to have the essential skills they need to provide for themselves or to continue their education. Over the years, the quality of education that Levy County provides its children has continued to drop as other counties' quality of education has gotten better. For the 2016-2017 school year, out of 67 Florida counties, Levy County was near the

bottom of the State rankings. We were ranked 54th out of 67 counties; only 13 counties scored lower than Levy County.

The chart below represents the meat and potatoes of education, our number one priority.

It provides a comprehensive picture of how good of a job we do of preparing all of our students for their futures. We know that a few of our students have gone on to Harvard, Brown, and MIT, but the chart represents how well all of our students are performing. Just imagine how many more success stories we would have if our leadership guided us

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to be 14th from the top of the State rankings instead of 14th from the bottom.

We cannot change what we are willing to tolerate. Often, we have heard excuses from our leaders explaining why our students perform at the bottom of Florida counties: our county is poor, other counties have this, other counties have that, the Governor this, the Legislature that, home life isn't what it used to be, etc. Any or all of the above excuses could be true, but I am a firm believer that the success of our students begins with leadership. To find the answer to the question of why our students perform at the bottom of Florida counties, we have only to look as far as our leaders.

## What can you do?

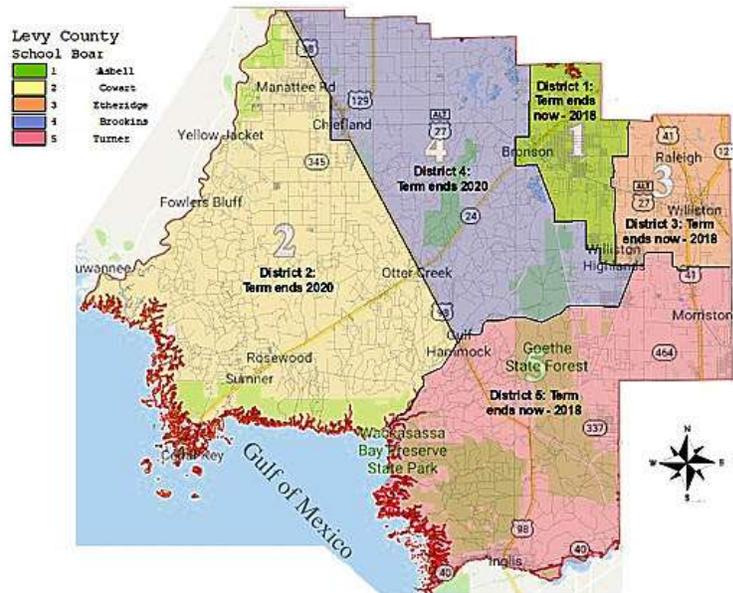
Consider running for your district school board seat. School Board Districts #1 (Cameron Asbell), #3 (Brad Etheridge), and #5 (Rick Turner) are on the ballot this year.

School Board Districts #2 (Chris Cowart) and #4 (Paige Brookins) will be up for a vote in 2020; make a note to yourself. Don't view your decision to enter the race as a popularity contest between you and the person you are running against. Instead, run

against his or her school board record of increasing overall student success. The chart above shows how long board members have been in office, along with Levy County's performance through the years. Currently, their leadership has Levy County ranked 54th out of 67 counties. The numbers speak for themselves.

The week to qualify is June 18 to 22. Begin the process now. Contact Tammy Jones, Supervisor of Elections at (352) 665-2475. She will guide you through the qualifying process. Because the date to qualify with signatures has passed, you will need to pay a qualifying fee of \$1,150.08. However, school board members make an annual salary of \$28,752, with benefits, and they officially meet two times a month, typically for less than an hour.

We need leaders who will change education in Levy County for the better. Who are you waiting on? Maybe our children are waiting on you?



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## **What else can you do?**

When our leaders explain to you any of the reasons why other counties outperform Levy County, ask them for their solution to the problem. What are they doing about the meat and potatoes of education? Ask them about their plan for reversing the current slide in student performance. Let's hold our elected officials accountable. Our students need change, and they need it now.

**Sincerely,**

**Jerry Lawrence**

**352-949-5110**