CCSD District 1

CANDIDATE SURVEY FOR CHARLESTON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT 1
(Mount Pleasant area)

Candidates running for this seat include

- **Char Fitzwater** Website: charforstudents.com
- **Keith S. Grybowski** Website: keithforschoolboard.com
- **Mark Little** Website: thinkbigvotemarklittle.com

Candidates were asked to respond to questions in 100 words or less. If they exceeded 100 words, their response ended at 100 words, as indicated by (100).

1. If elected, will you vote against going into executive session except for extraordinary personnel matters? Please explain your answer if it includes the possibility of doing business in private.

Fitzwater: No. The board needs to handle things legally and act in the best interests of our district. Any personnel issues and specific student-related matters must be considered by the board in executive session to protect legally established privacy rights of the employee or student who is the subject of those discussions. Other topics appropriate for confidential discussion include the board being advised on legal matters, discussing contract negotiations, or being advised of security system plans. Any decisions on executive session topics must be voted on in public session. The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) provisions align with these points.

Grybowski: I believe public business belongs in public. However, I would not adopt a blanket rule that ignores South Carolina's Freedom of Information Act. It permits executive sessions for narrowly defined matters, including certain student and personnel issues, contract negotiations, privileged legal advice, security concerns and

criminal investigations. I would vote for executive session only when the publicly stated purpose clearly falls within the law and staff or counsel explains why confidentiality protects students, employees, taxpayers or the district's negotiating position. Executive session must never shield routine business from scrutiny, and every decision and vote must occur in open session.

Little: Yes, this is one of the reasons I decided to seek this position. The School Board should conduct all business in the presence of the voters who elected them. Transparency should be a core principle of all Board business.

2. What long-term impacts do you foresee in the rising use and popularity of generative AI tools like ChatGPT over the next four years?

Fitzwater: Using Generative AI content has long term risk for our students' development and thinking capabilities. When submitting AI work as their own, students are cheating themselves out of learning and thinking, cheating their mental muscles out of the opportunity to try new ideas and see how they fit together, and shortcutting development of their ability to communicate what they think. When a generation avoids building their ability to understand differing perspectives, there are consequences. In fact, our society will be negatively impacted if we don't know how to build community by wrestling with ideas together

Grybowski: Generative AI is reshaping classrooms worldwide. We should explore its teaching potential without handing it control. As policy liaison, I've worked with district staff, teachers, students, and experts to assess its benefits and risks. Students need strong academic foundations and critical thinking skills before relying on technology that can confidently produce nonsense. AI may also discourage original thought. I support limiting screen time and AI access through fifth grade and making AI based curricula opt-in rather than opt-out.

Little: Schools have a responsibility to educate students using various means and methodologies. AI can be a useful aid to

instruction but it can also be a crutch that both teachers and students lean on too heavily. Fundamental instruction can be complemented with AI but students must learn to think critically in their formative years so that they understand that AI is a tool and not a replacement for thinking or understanding.

3. If you use generative AI for matters related to the school board, will you apply student standards to your use of it?

Fitzwater: Yes, I will apply student standards to my use of AI, both as an important example of integrity and as a personal standard. In using AI, the speed, agility and integration of a broad set of information sources is both impressive and disturbing. There are numerous limitations and risks of using the tool. One limitation is that AI does not typically use validated sources. The integrity of information used for making decisions influences the wisdom of that decision. But AI draws from all sources with no differentiation between rumor from data source.

Grybowski: I will apply the same standards of honesty, accuracy, privacy, disclosure, and accountability, but student and adult use are not apples to apples. I have used forms of AI for more than 40 years, supported by coding, technical, and legal experience. Today's generative AI is fascinating and sometimes frightening. I have seen it reverse earlier answers after repeated inquiries, and I am not proud of every AI graphic I have produced. AI is exceptional at summarizing large databases, but it cannot replace judgment. As a trustee, I must verify all facts and opinions for the final human decision.

Little: Yes, my use of any AI would be disclosed and would be limited to presentation design and formatting.

4. There's a sense in the community that the board has turned over much of its oversight authority to the superintendent. If you agree, how will you recapture oversight?

Fitzwater: The job of the board is not to run the district, but to make sure it is run well. That requires respectfully digging in to understand the legalities, ramifications and options on decisions. That means asking tough questions, considering divergent perspectives and inviting input from educators, legal counsel, experts and the community. It also requires the board members continuously build their knowledge regarding education, board oversight roles and complexities of the organization. The board is responsible for setting the policies of the district, which deserve active consideration to ensure the framework supports the district success in meeting its mission.

Grybowski: The question does not identify which members of "the community" hold this view or what oversight authority they believe was surrendered. Our policies clearly define the board's role: set policy, approve the budget, establish goals, and hire and evaluate the superintendent. The superintendent is responsible for administering the district. That is accountable governance, not an abdication of authority. This board has exercised its oversight responsibilities, including financial review, policy development, performance monitoring, and evaluation. Community disagreement deserves to be heard, but repeating an allegation does not make it factually true.

Little: The Superintendent manages the School District on a day to day basis and works with the Board to strategically plan for the future. The Superintendent's work over the last several years has been exemplary and I believe the Board should continue to work with her to execute the shared goals. Too often, Board members have their own agendas and seem to lose the plot.

5. Do you believe the school board has been overly politicized? If so, how will you rein it back into focus on local education issues?

Fitzwater: Our nonpartisan board has become politicized with a self-proclaimed "majority" often appearing more focused on an agenda than on excellent education for all students. The Charleston Teacher Alliance survey recently rated the board "Minimally Effective" with teachers' top recommendation being to "Avoid

politicizing classroom instruction and school practices." Five of nine board members voted themselves into all nine leadership positions in November and December. On April 27, 2026, the same majority rejected a request by three members for one week to obtain legal counsel before making a decision. Moving forward requires shared governance, mutual respect and transparency.

Grybowski: Too much time has been consumed by adult political disputes rather than student needs. From my first day as Audit and Finance chairman, I faced pushback for asking difficult questions about how public dollars were spent. Oversight is necessary, but it must serve not distract from education. Since hiring Superintendent Anita Huggins, the district has regained focus and direction. Our goals and guardrails for the next five years are clear. The Board must govern responsibly, limit political distractions, and allow staff to educate. Our improving test scores show that this disciplined, student centered approach is working.

Little: Yes, School Board elections are nonpartisan. Too often, Board members seek to bring their outside interests and agendas into meetings to get media attention and steer attention and focus away from critical needs and progress.

6. What are some issues that you personally want to address and repair during your time on the board?

Fitzwater: ENSURE STUDENTS ARE FIRST. Make balanced board decisions through the lens of "What's best for our students to learn and thrive." Supporting our front-line educators economically and for professional development is a key priority. Strategic initiatives including Orton-Gillingham literacy and universal pre-K drive stronger learning experiences. GET RID OF POLITICS. Move away from board-level distractions by bringing back shared governance, mutual respect and transparency. School board service is about responsible stewardship. STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT. Our families, teachers and constituents deserve two-way communications ensuring their voices are heard.

Coalescing their concerns supports our superintendent and her team in strengthening the district.

Grybowski: I do not view our work as repairing the district. Our priorities are clear: strengthen early education, expand universal 4K, address AI responsibly, and ensure every student has a strong foundation. Achieving these goals requires disciplined budgeting. Competitive teacher salaries are essential, but they bring significant long term costs, while aging schools need upgrades to meet modern standards. The district cannot meet these challenges alone. My more than 20 years of experience and bipartisan relationships with legislators will help secure resources and navigate state and federal requirements.

Little: I want to keep investing in teachers through increased pay and benefits. I want to depoliticize meetings and bring calm to the Board. I want to continue the progress that's been made with test scores, graduation rates, and school readiness.

7. What is your plan to ensure the school district is able to continue serving a growing student population as Charleston County attracts more and more residents?

Fitzwater: Proactive financial planning, including the district's five-year projections of student population and financial resources, is required to ensure long-term viability and health of our district. Simultaneously risks need to be assessed. For example, the fact federal and state funding are influx is a risk.

Because of limitations from the state on sources for funding capital projects (buildings, facilities and technology), capital funding for the district is achieved through a one percent county sales tax. The sales tax requires voter approval periodically, including this November.

Grybowski: Every day I meet families who moved to Charleston because of our schools. To serve continued growth, the Board must give our superintendent and staff the resources to carry out our Goals and Guardrails, plan facilities wisely, recruit and retain

excellent educators, and secure sustainable revenue. I am proud of the academic progress and national recognition CCSD has achieved over the past three years, but growth must benefit families already here as well as newcomers. That means expanding early learning, strengthening academic achievement, and building career pathways that prepare local students for the jobs created by companies choosing Charleston.

Little: CCSD has a strategic plan to ensure that we are able to continue serving the growing population. The tax referendum will ensure that this plan is executed in full. I support its passage and will work other elected officials in the future to make sure that funding is always in place to support public education.

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