



# Joseph "Joe" Geller

Miami Dade School Board District 3



The School Board of Miami-Dade County has nine members who govern the third largest public school district in the U.S with about 350,000 students. This year odd-numbered districts are up for election. In District 3, Joe Geller is running against Martin Karp.

*Joe Geller responded to our Voter Guide Questionnaire. Martin Karp did not respond.*

## **Why are you running for office, and how does your experience prepare you to be effective as a public servant in this position?**

I am unhappy with the direction of the school board, banning books, teaching fake history and targeting vulnerable kids. We need to protect our children, parents, teachers and staff, keep politics out of the classroom, and focus on giving kids the best possible education. As the father of a high school senior, this is personal to me. I served for 8 years in the State House, including on the Education Committee and the K-8 subcommittee, and was able to pass a strong anti-bullying bill into law.

## **Do you believe students and families currently have equitable access to well-resourced public schools across zip codes and neighborhoods in Miami-Dade?**

I do not. We must do more to make sure all students have access to quality educational opportunities. The public schools are a tremendous equalizing opportunity for everyone, but only when they function as intended. Our magnet school program is among the best in the country, and that's a step in the right direction, but it's not enough. We have to try innovative approaches, including principal effectiveness training, and allowing students to attend schools at diverse locations when possible.

## **Do you believe students have sufficient access to mental health services for students in schools? Why or why not?**

I do not. We woefully underserve students in providing mental health, and all health services. Students face many challenges in our society, including hostility from our state government. The prevalence of gun violence in our society is frightening for students, and so is the attempt to restrict reproductive rights. LGBTQ and trans kids are targeted, as are immigrants, black and brown kids, and as always, poor kids. While we solve these problems, we must provide more mental health resources.




**What do you believe Miami-Dade County Public Schools should prioritize when it comes to sex education in school curriculum?**

Most important is teaching the truth, not someone's personal morality or religion. Students need to be able to rely on what they're taught in school, not on someone else's agenda. Also, students must be taught how to stay safe and avoid unwanted pregnancies. In addition, students should be taught how to avoid the spread of disease. All of these things are possible if we simply teach the truth in our classrooms. Our children are entitled to the truth, and to our protection and assistance.

**Do you believe LGBTQ students currently feel safe and supported in Miami-Dade County Public Schools? What would be your priorities in addressing this issue?**


I do not. The recent defeat of the LGBTQ+ History proclamation only underscores the increasing problem in our schools. I attended the School Board meeting where the issue was debated, and I spoke out in favor of the proclamation. We must reverse policies targeting vulnerable students, like LGBTQ+ and trans kids, and provide a safe and supportive environment. I passed a bill into law while I was in the House that improved anti-bullying policies. We must do more to protect our vulnerable students.




**Do you believe there is potential for Miami-Dade County Public Schools to reduce punitive disciplinary approaches? What approach would you take to improve disciplinary measures and procedures?**

Yes. We do need discipline in our schools, but it should be supportive and not punitive. It must be designed to correct unhealthy and unproductive behaviors, not to punish already struggling students. We need a more productive and proactive approach designed to benefit students, not further alienate them. New approaches should yield fresh results. We need to try to develop these new methods to actually help improve student outcomes.

**If elected, would you recommend Miami-Dade County Public Schools strengthen access to voter registration and education for students?**



Yes. An educated citizenry is essential to the maintenance of democracy. We need more civics education in our schools. Voter registration opportunities for students are only a first step. We must provide students with the knowledge necessary for them to be informed citizens. We need a curriculum that engages students in the study of how to participate in governing themselves and teaches them how to make wise decisions in doing so. Our focus on civics and democracy will yield better citizens.






**What do you believe should Miami-Dade County Public Schools should prioritize when it comes to retaining and supporting teachers, as well as recruiting well-qualified educators?**

Raising salaries is the most important thing, but certainly not the only thing. We must be sure that we reward long-time quality teachers for their service while we continue raising starting salaries for new teachers. We also must ensure that teachers are treated with respect as professionals. We must convince citizens that we are using the resources they have already given us wisely and efficiently. These are among the reasons why the United Teachers of Dade have endorsed me in this election.

**What are your thoughts on the topic of book bans and removal of subject matter from curricula? What concerns would you like to have addressed?**

I am totally opposed to banning books. Making books unavailable to students is the functional equivalent of banning books. Altering curriculum to meet preconceived political goals is also totally unacceptable. We have to teach real history, even when that makes people uncomfortable. The pressure on textbook publishers to alter their content leads to inaccurate and inappropriate educational content. Parents have rights, but individual parents do not have the unilateral right to dictate content.



**What would be your priorities when it comes to addressing funding and budget concerns in our public school system?**

We need more resources, but we need to spend what we have efficiently and wisely before we ask citizens to give us additional resources. As a legislator, I fought for more money, as well as a fairer formula for distributing resources. I'll continue to lead that struggle as a school board member. We must also seek new solutions to budget problems. I support the installation of solar panels on our school properties to reduce energy costs. I also want to look at surplus properties to raise money.



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