

THE INFORMED DEMOCRAT OF SWFL



Meet the Candidates

An Interview with India Palencia, Candidate for Lee County School Board, District 6—*Continued*

September 1, 2025

Recently, we sat down with India Palencia, candidate for the Lee County School Board, District 6 (at-large), which means her name will appear on every ballot county-wide. In [Part One](#) of our interview, India shared her perspectives on critical issues including teacher pay and retention, school safety, technology in the classroom, equality, and more.

In Part Two, India provides her thoughts on school board policymaking and transparency, curriculum and book bans, equity in school construction, capital improvements, and racial incidents and inclusion. Here are the questions and India's responses:

On School Board Policymaking and Transparency

Lee Dems: What are your thoughts on the School Board Policy-Making Process?

India: School boards should focus on student outcomes, not political agendas. While policy decisions are inherently public, I believe the line should be drawn where partisanship overshadows what's best for students. I recently read a book entitled *How NOT to be a Terrible School Board Member*, and it addresses this. It is not the job of a school board member to push a "conservative" or a "progressive" political agenda or ideology on the public or district. It is the job of the School Board to remove our "party-colored glasses" and make choices solely for the educational quality for children in the school district. I believe having a board that is biased one way or the other will inherently fail to accomplish this goal.

LeeDems: How do you ensure transparency and community trust in board decisions?

India: I support MORE opportunities for the public to address their concerns. We need to go back to more frequent school board meetings. Once a month is not sufficient for a school district this size. By communicating openly, sharing the data and reasoning behind decisions, and giving the community meaningful opportunities to provide input before votes are taken, we can increase trust in our decisions.

I am always asking: "What are the School Board values when you look at the budget?" The School Board is in charge of the purse. We need a full accounting of salaries, positions and of the 15.9% cuts of the '25-'26 budget. There is a transparency issue when we look at the data supplied to us. I would ask for a complete forensic accounting of the budget and

expenditures. This Board appears to have undermined fair bargaining, a \$9k incentive to go to at-risk schools for one year was never presented at the bargaining table to the Union.

On Curriculum & Book Bans

LeeDems: How do you balance the role of state mandates, like the Parental Rights in Education law ("Don't Say Gay"), with the need to provide a comprehensive and inclusive education for all students?

India: It is true that we have to work within the laws that are mandated. What's important is that we ensure all children have an environment in which they are safe and supported. While we have laws that are dictating certain rights, we can certainly invest in non-political infrastructure to help support children, like guidance counselors and mental health professionals. Having clear stances and infrastructure to address bullying or discrimination and board policies on bullying as well as proper oversight that policy is being implemented.

LeeDems: What criteria should be used when deciding which books or topics are appropriate for school libraries and classrooms?

India: I think this is a choice best made by caregivers in coordination with teachers and librarians. As long as this process is clear and easily accessible then we are putting the children first.

LeeDems: Do you support the recent book removals in Lee County? Why or why not?

India: I understand the concerns of families who want to be involved in what their children read, but I also value access to a broad range of educational materials. My focus would be on making sure the process for reviewing books is consistent, transparent, and includes voices from caregivers and educators.

On Equity in School Construction

LeeDems: What is your view on the controversy surrounding the Bonita Springs Elementary rebuild—should historical preservation outweigh modern safety standards?

India: Safety must come first. While preserving history is valuable, it shouldn't come at the expense of students' well-being. I'd support solutions that incorporate historical elements where feasible while prioritizing modern safety and accessibility standards.

LeeDems: How would you ensure equitable investment in school facilities across all neighborhoods, especially underserved or historically neglected areas?

India: Investment decisions should be based on clear data—such as enrollment, building conditions, and growth trends—while also addressing historic underinvestment in certain areas. Every student deserves a safe, high-quality learning environment. An audit of this would help provide this insight and could guide decision making in a clearer manner.

LeeDems: How should community input be factored into construction and renovation projects?

India: Community input is essential. I'd support structured forums and surveys at key stages of planning so families and local residents can share feedback before decisions are finalized. I would prefer to see the return of recently cut committees to help facilitate this.

On Capital Improvements

LeeDems: Do you support a data-driven model for capital improvement decisions?

India: A transparent, data-driven model ensures fairness and helps the public understand why resources are allocated as they are, however, public input should always be consulted and weighed as an important factor into decision making. Data isn't the end all be all, but a starting point.

On Racial Incidents & Inclusion

LeeDems: What measures would you advocate to prevent and respond to racial discrimination incidents in our schools?

India: I want to be very clear- Racial Discrimination should be subject to a zero tolerance policy. Full. Stop. It is never a "joke" or an "accident" to type racial slurs or say them.

LeeDems: How should the district handle Title VI investigations and lawsuits related to racial discrimination?

India: We must fully cooperate with investigations, ensure compliance with federal laws, and address any identified gaps. The goal should be preventing recurrence through stronger accountability, policies, and training.

LeeDems: What actions would you take to ensure schools are inclusive, welcoming, and respectful environments for all students?

India: Facilitating better relationships. That means listening to students and families, providing staff with training on cultural competency, and creating clear pathways for anyone to report concerns without fear of retaliation.

LeeDems: How should the district address concerns over unequal treatment or slow progress in desegregation and equity in historically marginalized zones?

India: Transparency is key. We need to acknowledge disparities, share progress openly with the public, and set measurable goals for equity in funding, staffing, and program access.

LeeDems: What does educational equity mean to you, and how would you prioritize it in your decision-making?

India: Equality means every student—regardless of background or ZIP code—has access to the resources, opportunities, and support they need to succeed. I would prioritize policies and investments that close opportunity gaps.