

Five people are running for the three Meade School Board seats up for election June 7. Vying for the three three-year terms are incumbents John Nachtigall, Owanka, Lee Spring, Union Center and new candidates, Sandy Cass, Sturgis, Justin Jutting, Sturgis and Kami Wolf-Perli, Piedmont. For information about polling locations and absentee voting, call the Meade School District business office at 347-2523 ext. 1.

John Nachtigall has been a member to the Meade School District school board since 2020 and a board member of the Lakeside Township since 2021. John has two children, James, a sophomore at Wall High School and Attison, an eighth grader at Elm Springs Elementary School. John is very passionate about agriculture and livestock and is a self-employed rancher in Owanka, SD.

Since John has been serving on the school board, he feels he can “better serve the students of the district due to my prior service.” He believes “the district is doing a great job of hiring additional teachers which helps with the student to teacher ratios.” He is happy with the STEM labs along with the extra programs that are available at Sturgis Brown High School. John’s main concern about education in the district is that “all students have an equal opportunity to learn.”

John is a volunteer firefighter with the Elm Springs Fire Department and has helped with the rural basketball teams.

Lee Spring has been a member to the Meade School District school board since 2020 and elected as vice president in 2021. Spring and his wife Jamie, have two children, Emma, an 8th grader and Joni, a 6th grader, that attend Atall School. Lee also attended Atall School for grades K-8 and went on to graduate from Sturgis Brown High School. Spring is a 5th generation rancher on the family ranch near Union Center. Spring is a member of the Union Center Community Baptist Church and also volunteers with Meade County Shooters 4H Shooting Sports as an archery coach and rural kids’ basketball program.

Lee is wanting to continue his role as a board member because he believes “every child should have the opportunity to be educated to the best of the school district’s ability, and I would like to be a part of ensuring that happens. I would like to give back to the school district that educated me. I strive to be honest and fair in every decision I make and have worked hard to listen with an open mind to concerns and ideas from people across our school district. It has been an honor and a challenge to serve our children and communities on the school board this last three years, and I would like to continue to do so for another term.

Lee feels “our entire district has phenomenal educators who go above and beyond for our children every single day. They are an enormous asset. I am excited to see where the leadership of a new superintendent and activities director take our entire district in the coming years. One issue I think needs to be a priority is keeping the teacher to student ratio as low as we possibly

can. The current board is working to address this, but it's an ongoing issue as our district continues to grow."

Lee believes as being a board member, it has "opened my eyes to the complexity of education and the roles played by the educators, administration, school board, parents and even the children, and I am grateful for the experience I have gained. I feel I have worked hard to listen to and appreciate the viewpoints of parents, taxpayers and educators across the entire district, and would like to have the opportunity to continue to do so for another term. As always, I welcome questions and discussion and would be honored to continue to serve our communities.

Sandy Cass is a new candidate to the Meade School District school board. Sandy is a Sturgis Brown High School graduate and has lived most of her life within the district. Currently, she works for the State of South Dakota Division of Child Support as a Child Support Specialist Supervisor. Sandy and her husband, Pat, have two children, a daughter, EmmahLeigh, a senior at Sturgis Brown High School and a son, Owen, a junior at Sturgis Brown High School. Her husband, Pat, has been a teacher with the Meade School District since 2003 and a coach for over 15 years.

Sandy is running for school board as she believes that she can look at issues from many different ways. "Meade School District poses challenges that other districts do not have, and I think that I can bring a commonsense approach to the board and can look at all of the facts before making sound decisions." Sandy intends to "represent the people that live within the district in ensuring that our kids are getting the best education and experiences possible."

Sandy is especially "excited about the new administration changes within the district" and believes "the changes that are in the works will bring a fresh perspective and hopefully the board can build off those changes and make our district even better. Some standout things that individual schools do that I see having positive impacts are the elementary school bringing in high school student athletes to help with their reading challenges, the middle school having the 8th graders tour the high school with high school students to help prepare them for the next year the high school offering multiple options for extracurricular activities."

Sandy believes the "Meade School District has an amazing group of teachers and wants to make sure that they are supported as best they can be. So much has changed over the last couple of years and we need to make sure that the teachers have been given the appropriate tools to keep up with the times so they can be successful. Education is always a hot topic and there is a lot of give and take when trying to juggle the wants and wishes of the district and the parents, but when it comes down to it, we need to make sure that we are looking out for the best interest of the kids. I think a concern that most districts have is how to keep up with changing demographics and technology. I believe that we already do a really good job of this, but we

need to make sure that we are continuing to be innovative and using creative thinking to keep us moving forward. “

Sandy is a member of the post-prom committee for Sturgis Brown High School. When her kids were younger, she volunteered by keeping the books for the Scooper Basketball Club games. She volunteered as a cheer coach and ran the concession stand with the Buccaneers Youth Football Program. For the last two years, she has assisted with the Choices Simulation that is put on by YLT at Sturgis Brown High School. Lastly, she sat on the community member panel for interviews of the superintendent candidates.

Sandy is “excited at the possibility of being an advocate and a voice for the students of the Meade School District. I feel that I am an honest person who uses logical thinking to make decisions and hope that I will be the right choice for this board. “

Justin Jutting is a new candidate to the Meade School District school board. Justin and his wife, Katy, have three children, Chase, a 3rd grader at Sturgis Elementary School, Owen, whom will be attending Sturgis Elementary School, and a daughter Emma, a kindergartener at Sturgis Elementary School. His wife, Katy, has been a teacher with the Meade School District since 2011. Justin is currently the Assessment Coordinator/Program Director for Western Dakota Technical College and the General Manager for Rushmore Tramway Adventures.

Justin is running for school board for several reasons. First and foremost is his “belief in education and the important roles we play in children's lives and creating learning experiences that will set them up for success as adults. It is critical that this path is started with early learning experiences and carried on throughout all years of education. Second, as an alumni of Sturgis, I believe it is my duty to pay it forward for the opportunities that have been provided to me by volunteering my time and skills that would be beneficial to a school board. I believe one of the ways I can help influence and represent the interests of the constituents of Meade School District is to be an advocate on the school board.”

Justin believes he would be a great fit for the school board for a variety of reasons. “I have in-depth knowledge of education and what elements are essential to creating students who are ready to tackle the next levels of education. I believe my 17 years in higher education and teaching dual enrollment provides me with an inside view of what it takes to educate individuals. I have been identified as a leader in assessment in my school and have also been a committee chair for the past 6 years, overseeing the operations and ensuring shared governance drives assessment on the campus. I recognize the importance of data and how it needs to be used to guide decisions of what is best for our district. I have participated in both programmatic accreditations, which I was the lead for two accreditation visits, and multiple college accreditations which I led a criterion group to provide evidence that the college was complying in meeting accreditation regulations. Not only do I understand the educational components of the school operations, but I also have extensive business management

experience which is instrumental to understanding the inner workings of a school district. Finally, and most importantly, I am a father of three great kids and a coach/mentor to numerous kids in the community. I have the best interest of our youth in mind at all times and I want to support the kids and the heart of our community as they grow into adults. I am dedicated to the Meade School District community and advocating for the needs of those in our community.”

Some concerns that Justin has with the Meade School District would mostly be limited to, “is data driving student learning? Does staff feel they are appropriately trained to handle the upcoming changes in education and ensuring a plan to keep highly qualified staff in Meade School District? My larger concern for education with the Meade School District would be the outside influences that the district has to contend with such as school accreditation, state standards, and the future landscape of K-12 education. In many schools, accreditation and state standards feel like the responsibility of one individual or an office of individuals, in my opinion, these should be the responsibility of every member in the district from custodial, paraprofessionals, teachers, administrators, volunteers, school board members, and all other staff. Accreditation and standards are not the stick, they are the path to a culture of betterment for the students the district serving. The future landscape of K-12 is currently under a lot of scrutiny, with changing standards, increased expectations by accrediting bodies, and considerations being made about the expectations of teachers at state and federal levels. Educational demands are changing and the ability to continue to meet the stringent criteria will become more difficult.”

Justin’s community and volunteer involvements include:

Sturgis Buccaneers Football and Cheer Commissioner 2019-present

Sturgis Buccaneers Football Coach 2019-present

Sturgis Baseball Coach 2019-2021

Sturgis Softball Coach 2021

Assisted in food pick-up for Kiwanis Food Pantry food drives

Sturgis Elementary parent volunteer for classroom events

Parade of Lights participant 2020 & 2021

SBHS Career Fair participant

Justin would like to express that “education is more than "just" academic. For a student to perform well academically, they have to have offerings that interest them, a culture that supports them, and an environment that is engaging and inviting. If elected to the Meade School Board, I believe it is my obligation to serve the students of our community to ensure their academic success.”

Kami Wolf-Perli is a new candidate to the Meade School District school board. Kami has attended the Meade School District since kindergarten as a Piedmont Stallion and graduated in 2004 from Sturgis Brown High School. Kami and her husband, Tayler, have three daughters, Piper, a kindergartner at Piedmont Valley Elementary, Sayler, a preschooler at Piedmont Valley Elementary and little one-year old Hattie. From 2009-2019, Kami was a diagnostic radiologic technologist for the federal government. In 2019, Kami and her family decided she would

become a stay-at-home mom to care for their daughter, Saylor who has down syndrome. In her spare time, Kami also manages the books for their family business, PB&J Lawncare.

Kami is running for school board “because this district is very near and dear to my heart. Having young children enrolled, I feel people should vote for me because I really do care about Meade School District for the long haul. I will make decisions as if your children were my children because essentially, they are as they are my children’s friends and peers and I want the best possible opportunities for my children’s future.”

Kami believes the Meade School District has “the most professional and talented educators in the state. We are very fortunate for the educators we have, and the teachers are always a wonderful memory for me as a previous student. A huge positive in my opinion is the free student lunches. Times are tough for a lot of families, and this may be some students only meal for the day. I know this is ending, but if elected, I will try and find another grant for this to continue.”

As a candidate running for school board, Kami is concerned about “the rapid growth in our area. I worry about the student/teacher ratio. I think it is only fair to our students and educators that this ratio remains low. If you look at the top 25 districts in the state, one of the commons is a low student/teacher ratio. The current board is working hard at finding a way to fund a high school and if elected, I will research every way possible to try to make that happen. I would also like to see more advanced classes in the curriculum at the high school level. I think it would help our students be more competitive for scholarships and better prepared for college. We have many communities that make up our high school. I would like to see improvements on these community relationships so that families of different communities do not feel that they are sending their student to a different town just for school that they do not feel a part of. The more these families/communities are able to come together as one, the stronger our schools will be. I also worry about fair opportunities for our students. Are all of our students getting a fair chance at being able to participate in extracurricular activities? It is no secret gas prices are extremely high, can all of our out-of-town families afford to let their students drive to school for practice or meetings? I know there is an activity bus, but does that bus always align with the practice schedule? Are practices/meetings being held at reasonable times for students who have a lengthy commute? I do think some of our students are missing out on opportunities because of location.”

Kami feels that “a vibrant community depends on education and focusing on our youth. If elected to this board, I will be open, honest, available, and ready to listen to what is wanted/needed for our schools. If I don't know the answers, I will use my resources and do the research that will provide the best possible outcome for our students and educators. I will always be a Stallion and Scooper at heart and want nothing more than an awesome community that provides excellent education for years to come so our children can put their best foot forward and succeed. Education is the one thing that cannot be taken from you. I would really appreciate your vote because I want to give back to the district that has brought so many memories and knowledge to my life.”