

Briggman To Run For School Board Plans To Start Gathering Signatures Next Week

By **NOLAN STOUT**

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HARRISONBURG — Two familiar foes will face off for the Rockingham County School Board's District 3 seat in the fall.

Dave Briggman said he plans to mount a campaign to unseat incumbent Renee Reed in the November election.

Reed, the nonpartisan board's chairwoman, and Briggman, 53, also squared off in 2013, when

Reed was first elected.

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Briggman

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In 2013, Reed received 42.59 percent of votes in the district, which includes the attendance areas of Spotswood High School, Montevideo Middle School and Cub Run and South River elementary schools. Briggman received 26.97 of the vote, behind Jim Elmore, who received 29.85 percent.

Reed is the only candidate to file for the election, Rockingham County Registrar Lisa Gooden said Tuesday. Reed did not return a call seeking comment for this story.

Briggman said he plans to start gathering signatures next

week. He is the director of special programs for Nexus Services Inc. and regularly speaks his mind on local government issues, which he acknowledged makes him “known as a gadfly.”

Briggman, who described himself as politically conservative, doesn't pull any punches when discussing the School Board. He took swipes at almost every board member, saying, among other things, that they don't know how the division is running because they don't have children in it.

Briggman has two sons enrolled, and his wife is a counselor at Spotswood High School.

He also said the board's political makeup doesn't match that of the overwhelmingly Republican county.

By law, no candidate for school board in Virginia may be nominated by a political party, although the endorsement of a candidate by a political party is not prohibited.

He disagrees with several policies and programs adopted by the board, which he said burdens taxpayers.

One of Rockingham County Public Schools' recent programs he took issue with is the digital conversion initiative, which aims to provide all children with an electronic device.

raise to teachers with more than 10 years' experience.

Officials have said the raise will make the division competitive with surrounding school systems, but Briggman said the move would backfire.

“What they do is they jack their salaries up and all the neighboring divisions will jack their salaries up and Rockingham will be back at the bottom of the barrel,” he said. “We can't afford it” Briggman, as he did when he last sought election, also called out several board decisions that he said are out of line with state law, most notably a September 2012 revision to the division's harassment and discrimination policy.

The policy prohibits harassment based on, among other things, sex and gender. It lays out protections for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students and faculty.

Briggman said — and Schools Superintendent Carol Fenn said at the time — the policy was re-examined after a 13-year-old committed suicide in California. An investigation into the suicide by the U. S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights concluded that school division didn't properly handle sexual and gender-based harassment of the student by his peers.

Among other criticisms, Briggman said the policy is invalid because state law doesn't allow localities to set out protections not included in Virginia code.

Also up for election in the fall is School Board member LaDonna Shiflet. Shiflet, who is the director of housekeeping at Bridgewater College, represents District 1, which includes the attendance areas for J. Frank Hillyard Middle School, Fulks Run, John C. Myers, Plains and Lacey Spring elementary schools and Broadway High School, of which she is a graduate.

Shiflet didn't return calls on Tuesday.

The terms of the other three board members, Dan Breeden, Lowell Fulk and Charlette McQuilkin, aren't up until 2019.

“ These Chromebooks are next to useless unless you have them actively connected to the internet,” he said. “ Most of the county doesn’t have good broadband access.”

The division also is creating a burden on taxpayers, he said, by continuously increasing teacher salaries.

Included in the division’s budget for the upcoming fiscal year, which starts July 1, is a plan to increase salaries by 2 percent and give an additional

Contact Nolan Stout at 574- 6278 or nstout@dnronline.com

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_ Dave Briggman, on digital conversion in the county