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*highlighting and emphasis added*

## Russell Toms runs for BOE

By [Michael Prochaska](#) | March 6, 2024 | [0](#)



Russell Toms, a former healthcare professional who is now the **relationship manager** for national payment processing company and technology provider Worldpay, qualified this week to run for Board of Education Post 4.

As a Republican candidate for that seat, Toms is challenging fellow newcomer Andy Pippin. The incumbent, Tim Burgess, announced earlier this month that he will not see re-election.

Toms and his wife have two children, and the reason they moved to Oconee is the school system.

“There’s not a teacher, administrator or bus driver we haven’t trusted with what they are doing with our children,” he said. “As a parent, I have a tremendous drive to help ensure that other families have the same experience that my wife and I have had.”

Formerly an x-ray tech and then an **administrator for a hospital system** in Elberton, Toms took a different career path following the coronavirus pandemic. At Worldpay, **Toms negotiates contracts** with key stakeholders.

In the healthcare industry, he served on financial revenue committees and emergency department reporting committees. **He agreed completely with how Oconee County Schools responded to COVID-19.**

On the subject of **future growth** in Oconee, Toms said he brings a unique perspective as a recreational soccer and football coach.

“I worry about not having enough places for each kid who wants to play football,” he said, adding that the same logic applies to performing arts and other school-sanctioned extracurricular activities.

“There is still the **west side of the county that will grow significantly** over the next 10 years,” he said, noting that OCS needs **services to support that growth—from computers and technology** to school nurses and other support staff.

If elected, Toms said he will weigh the options **of building a new high school or expanding** North Oconee High School very carefully.

On the subject of **Chromebooks, Toms said improvements can be made to make them more user-friendly** for parents and to ensure that they are being used appropriately.

“I like the idea that our schools are preparing our kids not just to pass the SAT but to work in a similar fashion [as the real world],” he said. “**I wish I had the same computer knowledge that my daughter and son have** when I graduated high school.”

When asked how he would approach the budgeting process, Toms said he wants to make sure that athletics and the **technology portion of the budget are fully funded**. Noting that his eighth-grade son has had the same Chromebook since early elementary school, he would like for **Chromebooks to not just be repaired but also upgraded and replaced in a timely manner**.

On budget hearings, Toms said that he would like to be as transparent as possible with the public.

“If questions haven’t been answered to somebody’s expectations, perhaps a separate budget meeting explaining items line by line,” he said, adding that he’s always willing to meet with citizens one-on-one as well.

As a fiscal conservative, Toms is a fan of small government, and he believes a strong school system begets a strong community. That said, there’s always room for improvement, he said, giving the following analogy: “If you get an A on a math test, you still have to study for the next one.”

“I want our community to stay awesome forever,” he said. “And hopefully, my children will have children who attend Oconee County Schools.”

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