

Oshkosh Chamber of Commerce

Candidate Questionnaire

Spring Election 2020—Board of Education, Oshkosh Area School District

Barb Herzog, retired educator (preK-college) and community volunteer

Currently, I am involved in the following community activities:

- President, Oshkosh Area School District Board of Education
- President, Oshkosh St. Vincent de Paul Council and Store volunteer
- President, SOAR (Special Opportunities for Artist Residencies)
- Member and lector, Most Blessed Sacrament Parish
- Member, Women’s Fund of the Oshkosh Area Community Foundation
- Member, Women Who Care
- Ambassador, Oshkosh Chamber of Commerce

1. As a member of the Board of Education, I have reviewed the proposed four-phased facility consolidation plan on numerous occasions. The Board had charged the Facilities Advisory Committee to consider several criteria in making advisory recommendations to the Board for future action:

- Proposed options / renovations / upgrades that support learning environments that are safe, accessible, efficient, and equitable.
- Purposeful spaces that inspire innovative learning, accommodate evolving technology, and promote collaboration amongst students, staff, parents, and community.
- A solution that maximizes use, reuse, and / or replacement of existing facilities and is cost effective for the taxpayer, providing for an enduring end-product that is energy-efficient and adaptable for decades to come.

I am in support of the proposed plan as I believe that it addresses the criteria defined by the Board. I believe that the Plan is consistent with Goal 4 of the District's 2019-2024 Strategic Plan to Prioritize a Safe Learning & Working Environment and Goal 2 to Become Operationally Efficient. It is very expensive and inefficient to maintain 13 elementary schools, 5 middle school, and 2 high schools. Consolidation of 20 schools to 14 schools would decrease our maintenance costs and lead to increased efficiencies, improved economies of scale, and more curricular options for students. The plan does involve all K-12 schools. West High opened its doors in 1960 and North in 1972. Both schools require meaningful curricular updates to allow them to better meet the needs of students who will live and work in the 21st century.

A Building Cost/Benefit Analysis Study conducted by Bray and Associates of Sheboygan was shared with the Board of Education in Fall 2017. It concluded that \$116.0 million was needed to update, improve building systems, and address Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) needs. The study did not address learning spaces and preparing learners who will spend their working years in the 2020's and beyond. Building new schools will reduce the total cost of the needs identified in the Bray report.

Consolidation of schools has many positive benefits. I have been part of consolidation efforts twice in my education career. Neither experience resulted in larger class sizes. With consolidation, staff follow the students. Consolidation of schools may lead to increased quality and quantity of services for students, increased supports for students (staff/student), future added supports focused on fewer sites, balanced class sizes, more course offerings, and removal of facility limitations for staff and students. With a limited budget, priorities and choices always need to be made. Larger schools may result in fulltime personnel serving students without having to lose staff-to-student time because staff are part-time in two schools and have to travel between schools to serve students.

Closing schools is always a challenging and emotional endeavor for the students and their families. I have experienced this myself as a teacher. Distance from student homes to the newer proposed schools may be longer than what students currently experience. However, I believe that transportation issues could be addressed. For example, the Board, City

Council, and community donors recently pledged funds to provide free city bus transportation for 2 years beginning in the 2020-2021 school year to all district students (public and private). The average age of our 20 buildings is more than 65 years old. Many of the learning spaces are not designed for learning activities to prepare students for the work world of the future in the 21st century.

The consolidation plan does not address all of the facilities needs in the district. For example, it does not address outdoor learning spaces for physical education classes and for athletics. I have supported the development of a comprehensive long-range facilities plan for these outdoor learning spaces and athletic facilities. In addition, I have recently been in the Town of Algoma several times and noted numerous new housing starts in that area. The Facilities Advisory Plan will need updating to provide for the impact of these and other housing starts on all phases of the proposed plan.

2. I received the Chamber Candidate Questionnaire about March 2, 2020. So much has changed so rapidly (and will continue to change) with the current national emergency that my answer to this question has changed since I first received the Questionnaire. While I do support the Facilities Advisory Council Plan, I believe that a possible November 2020 referendum might be best to only address continuing funding for the soon to expire technology and operational referendum from 2014.

The 2014 Referendum for Learning included a \$2.5 million allocation to support programs which might otherwise have been cut. This referendum included \$1.45 million for each of 7 years to support technology additions and upgrades. As a result of the 2014 Referendum:

- Oshkosh Area School District (OASD) is a major leader in Wisconsin in 1:1 deployment via our Learning Without Limits initiative for all students in grades 3-12 and 2 students per device in Grades K-2.
- OASD has taken care of all 800 classrooms with state-of-the-art technology.
- OASD continues to support universal access for all students and teachers with the most modern resources.

At the same time that our district was implementing the 2014 referendum, the Appleton Area School District held a referendum and received \$25 million in one-time funds for tech ed facilities, classroom tech, and 1:1 student devices. They also have received \$5 million annually with no end date. Appleton provides for 1:1 devices only in grades 7-12.

The OASD could not have done what has been accomplished in preparing teachers and students beginning on Monday, March 16, 2020 for student learning at home, with access to ChromeBooks, hotspots, etc. had it not been for the 2014 Referendum for Learning. Oshkosh has clearly been a leader in preparing teachers, students, and parents for use of Chromebooks and at home learning. Teachers, students, and parents will have the means to communicate and to continue to support student learning and growth during this national emergency due to the 2014 Referendum for Learning and the proactive and visionary work of our Tech Team, teachers, administrators, and other staff.

3. The proposed plan of the Facilities Advisory Committee (FAC) has provided the Board with a long-range facilities plan that could take at least 10-20 years to implement. I will request that the plan be enhanced to be more comprehensive with including the outdoor learning spaces mentioned in Question 1 above along with looking at the impact of housing starts throughout the district. I will request expanding the composition of the Facilities Advisory Committee (as needed) to be sure to represent interests of the entire community. I will recommend holding listening sessions to provide additional time to seek input from the public as well as share information with them on the need for long-range planning of facilities, preventive maintenance, and mid to large capital needs. The concept of planning 20+ years out in these areas has not been a strength of the district. The current Board is seeking to change this concept by developing a 10-20-year facilities plan for the district.

Agendas and summaries of all 6 of the Facilities Advisory Committee meetings in 2019-2020 can be found on the district's website (www.oshkosh.k12.wi.us). In addition, oral summaries can be found of each of the Committee's meetings in the recordings of School Board meetings from September-December 2019 and on the District's You Tube Channel

[\(OASD YouTube Channel\)](#). The Board held meetings and discussed the Facilities Advisory Committee Plan during a total of 4 meetings in January and February 2020. All of this communication was provided in order to have an open and transparent process for the community.

4. For many years, we have heard that all students need some kind of formal education after high school if they are to support themselves and a family. This education can be addressed in many ways including technical college and apprenticeships. I strongly believe in technical education and its value to the individual and to our community. On a personal note, my recent interactions with apprentices in plumbing and electrical work who have been in my home to deliver these services have only served to reinforce my interest in and support for such programs.

Recently the Board of Education unanimously supported the establishment of a Fab Lab (digital manufacturing lab) at Oshkosh North High School. While the request for the North Fab Lab came as a result of the Wave Robotics Program, I was aware of Fab Labs in other school districts a few years ago and suggested that Oshkosh look into such a program. Working with the Board, Superintendent Dr. Vickie Cartwright, district staff, and community partnerships, I believe that we can make technical education and apprenticeships a higher priority and establish stronger expectations and accountability. Greater emphasis on technology education is consistent with our 2019-2024 Strategic Plan Goal 1 to Improve Student Learning for All to Ensure College, Career, and Community Ready.

5. Since revenue limits were put into effect about 1993, the Oshkosh District has been considered a low spending district as its spending per pupil has been below the state average. The District has been most grateful to the state of Wisconsin addressing the needs of low-spending districts over the last two years to increase our per pupil funding to get the district closer to the state average. Nonetheless, state funding for K-12 education is now closer to the funding level experienced in the last year (2010-2011) of the Governor James Doyle administration.

Most educators will note that the demographics and characteristics of our student population have been changing. With increasing numbers of English learners from other countries, increasing numbers of special education

students, increasing numbers of students with social and emotional issues, costs of education have been on the rise. These are just some of the variables that impact district costs.

It is always important to look at ways to lower costs. Our 2019-2024 Strategic Plan Goal 2 to Become Operationally Efficient includes the priority to Build and Use Systems Protocols and Processes to Improve Efficiencies. For the 2019-2020 school year, the Board approved a change in health insurance designed to lower district costs. Dr. Cartwright worked with district staff for 2019-2020 to reduce staffing in several areas in order to free up funds to provide a fulltime counselor in each elementary building to address social and emotional needs. Currently Dr. Cartwright and Executive Director of Business Services Sue Schnoor are looking into refinancing district debt to lower our interest rates. Dr. Cartwright and the Board have supported several grant writing proposals to secure more funding for the district. I have supported all of these efforts and will continue to work with the superintendent and Board to seek additional ways to reduce costs while addressing the needs of our students and district.

6. Property tax bills for 2019 showed a 7 % increase. However, the increase in the district's mill rate included a 45-cent increase for the state wide school voucher program. The cost of the voucher program for Oshkosh taxpayers has been steadily rising and is currently over \$2 million dollars. This cost will continue to rise since the income level to qualify has increased each year.

As noted in my answer to #5 above, the changing demographics and characteristics of students are different than they were 5 and 10 years ago, resulting in increased costs to educate students. Oshkosh has been a low-spending district since the implementation of revenue limits in 1993.

7. At this time, I would support a November 2020 referendum to extend the 2014 Referendum for Learning for at least 7 years with \$2.5 million for operational expenses so as to avoid the need to cut student programs, and \$1.45 for upgrades to technology to enhance student learning. This would not result in an increase to the property tax bills. The impact of such a 2020

referendum for operations and technology on tax bills would maintain the current level of support from the 2014 Referendum for Learning.