

**Oshkosh Chamber of Commerce  
Candidate Questionnaire**

**Spring Election 2024 – Board of Education, Oshkosh Area School District**

Please provide some personal background information.

- Timothy Hess
- Statistician / Developer / Development Consultant / Former Professor of Mathematics
- Board member of Greater Oshkosh Economic Development Corporation and emeritus board president of Habitat for Humanity of Oshkosh.

1. What do you believe is your primary responsibility as a board member? What will be your most important objective if you are elected to the board?

*My primary responsibility will be to hold the administrative leadership team accountable. This includes evaluating performance in academic achievement as well as critically evaluating the budget priorities and ensuring fiscal transparency to the taxpayer.*

*We need to see a change in mind-set. My primary objective will be to bring the science of education back into the board room, rather than the politics of education we see now. By the end of my three-year term, my hope is that my other fellow board members will begin to see that it is acceptable to critically evaluate our educational leadership in a respectful manner.*

2. There are distinct differences between each of the four candidates who are seeking positions on the Board of Education. Please outline what distinguishes your candidacy and qualifications from those of your opponents.

*I am likely the most rigorously trained candidate for this position given that I hold a PhD in statistics and educational research methods. I am capable of critically evaluating programs or interventions for academic rigor and effectiveness in the planning stages as well as during and after completion of the program. My opponents seem to take on blind faith that because our administrators are highly educated that any program suggested will simply work despite effectively seeing no change during their tenure. In part, this is because they rely on administrative leadership to tell them what data is important and how to present it. In turn, one shouldn't be surprised that what is presented tends to hide anything that doesn't appear to be a favorable result.*

*In addition, my experience as a development consultant and expert in tax increment financing will aid me in critically evaluating the budget and financial decisions that impact the local property tax payer.*

3. The Department of Public Instruction produces annual report cards that indicate overall student achievement and engagement. While the Oshkosh Area School District received an overall score of 68.4, which puts the district in the “Meets Expectations” category, there are still opportunities for improvement when compared to the rest of the state in Advanced and Proficiency ratings such as English Language Arts & Mathematics. As a member of the Board of Education, what will you do to ensure improved scores in these two areas?

*As stated previously, my background in statistics and program evaluation will allow me to be able to critically appraise programs and action plans proposed by district leaders. Part of what I have seen is that our board simply does not understand much of the information or strategies presented to them. I would encourage that any new program or plan come with an evaluation logic model that will help illuminate just how any program is likely to impact our students prior to implementation. In addition, I will call for any plan to delineate clear and measurable outcomes or metrics as well as a plan for the timing of analysis. The logic model and regular analytics might help identify shortcomings as early as possible so that we can effectively bring the appropriate resources to a given problem as quickly as possible.*

4. OASD is committed to ensuring all students graduate College, Career and Community Ready (CCCR). What qualities do you feel a student graduating College, Career and Community Ready possesses? Do you feel that OASD is currently succeeding in creating CCCR graduates? If not, what areas need improvement, and how would you help facilitate that as a member of the Board of Education?

*I wholly agree that our success shouldn't solely be determined by scores in English and Mathematics. We must be cognizant of the diversity of plans our students might have after graduation and try our best to support whatever direction each student chooses. Some of our students are college ready, but some that want to go in that direction are not. However, the career and community readiness areas are something I feel like our schools are doing a good job on. Here, employers are looking for graduates to be able to work with others or in a team, and other soft skills. Our classrooms seem to do a good job of encouraging collaborative work. I believe our district has continued to work with the chamber and business leaders to stay up to date with the desire of local employers. I would continue to advocate for and support these collaborations.*

5. Tech Education - the old Industrial Arts programs - has been slowly disappearing for many years for various reasons. Please describe your thoughts as to the need for these programs. Describe how much emphasis/weight you personally would put on this in your decision-making process as well as from a policy, expectations, and accountability stance.

*I have assisted my friend and business partner for nearly two decades in the realm of development and general contracting and believe that these skills are in extremely high demand and can provide family supporting wages. But beyond the employment potential, having a well-rounded understanding of mechanical systems or construction methods will aid the younger generation in maintaining their homes. We will continue to need well trained individuals in these fields and would support maintaining these programs in our schools.*

6. Long-Range Planning – Oshkosh has made significant progress regarding facility improvement, and current examples are the opening of the new Vel Phillips Middle School in the fall of 2023 and the new Menominee Elementary School, which is currently under construction. However, Oshkosh area residents have seen their annual OASD tax bills increase by over 30% since 2020. With an updated 10-year Facility Plan in place, please describe how you will stabilize and prioritize this expenditure growth with more proposed school improvement projects on the horizon. Also, discuss your thoughts on how the OASD should address replacement plans and long-term preventative maintenance on its aging facilities, specifically our high schools.

*I can appreciate the effort that has gone into developing a long-range facilities plan. It is important for our community to understand the potential needs of our schools and allow our educators to make the case for continued improvements. That said, the price tag that comes with the plan will, in my opinion, will overburden our local taxpayers. Before we move forward on any next phase, I believe we need to get an updated facilities study. In part, I say this because our last report was generated in 2017 and thus outdated. However, I also substantially question the validity of the report. I say this, because I was one of the four people that bought Smith School from the district. In my opinion the reported needs and associated costs were substantially overstated. Moreover, I believe any facilities study should be conducted by an independent firm that doesn't stand to make substantial consulting fees from the construction of new buildings.*

*Before the community will support any new buildings, I believe our district leaders need to make substantial efforts to increase fiscal transparency. In large part, the reason the school portion of the property tax bill has increased is because our district has chosen to tax substantially more than what we were told to secure our vote. For example, someone who owns a property valued at \$200,000 paid just under \$1,200 more in property taxes over the last two years than what the district told us in 2020 and still has on their website. If we did levy what we were told in 2020, the entirety of the 30% increase taxpayers have seen would go away. District leaders have been clear that their goal is to get the levy up next year to the point that would support the next \$170 million referendum planned for the spring of 2025. If they accomplish this, they will then be able to say to the taxpayer, "If you vote for this, it won't cost you much more." I believe this is wrong and that we should be following through with what we originally told voters to secure their votes.*

*That said, I appreciate our leaders desire to continue to advocate for updated facilities. However, when it comes to large investments in our built environments, these decisions must be left to the voting public.*

7. What reforms, if any, would you support to fund public school operations? What is your view of school choice?

*I am supportive of the state investing in proven methods that significantly increase academic achievement, provide resources for mental health, or increase student safety, through increased appropriations from the general fund that will not increase the local tax levy. The problem I see is that our state leaders prefer to use political rhetoric rather than rigorous evaluation to determine if a program is effective thus would suggest my support might be few and far between. Our schools did see a significant increase in funding from Governor Evers this last summer. I believe our schools should be able to live within their means.*

*I do support the use of school choice vouchers. Given the achievement we have seen in our public schools, I cannot blame parents for wanting to seek alternative programs for their children.*

8. WDPI studies report concerning trends within the current education workforce, including declining teacher retention rates on new teachers within their first five years, education program enrollment still below levels seen in 2008-09, and only 67% of possible new teachers entering the public education system along with high numbers of unfilled K-12 education positions. As a member of the Board of Education, what will you do to ensure improved retention rates among educators?

*Our teachers are one of the most critical factors for improving our performance. We need to ensure that they are compensated fairly and provided with a supportive work environment. A solid market study should be able to determine fair compensation, however, many teachers I have talked with are concerned about the caliber of their health insurance. This is something that needs to be reviewed closely.*

*There are two factors I have heard in terms of a supportive environment. First, the teachers are looking for servant leadership from the administrative team. The concern is that many initiatives or training take time away from teachers being in front of students and that this should be minimized. And second, it is abundantly apparent that the voice of the teacher is substantially absent in the board room. We need a tool where teachers can anonymously weigh in to programs and/or curriculum without facing any retribution for providing input and without it being filtered by administration.*

9. The Oshkosh Chamber of Commerce is working with local businesses and the school district on programming to help create employable students. Some surrounding communities have created alternative/untraditional programming, such as the ACE Academy in Fond du Lac, that allows industry professionals to teach their skilled trade specialties directly to as many as 300 students within the existing school year using hands-on applications. With teacher shortages and upcoming building construction already in consideration, would you consider adding alternative education options into strategic planning conversations if supported by the local business population?

*We must continue to be open to offering novel forms of education that get students ready for the next stage of their lives. Many of our students want to enter the workforce immediately after graduation and programming like this can help these students achieve more skilled positions and help our local business community address the substantial workforce shortages they are facing. I would be fully supportive of looking more into this type of programming.*

10. What are the literacy challenges students face, and how would you address them?

*With under 36% of students being proficient likely students are struggling in many areas. However, to figure out what specific challenges they face we would need to look at the individual domain level results of the Forward Exam and the i-Ready assessments. Typically, this level of detail isn't shared at the board level. However, given that literacy had been a primary focus in the district for years and we have seen little improvement, it might be time that the board looks at this information and requests of administration a logic model that addresses the individual domains to see how proposed solutions can actually help students.*

*Additionally, we have to question the proposed curriculum we are looking to use in the near future. Wisconsin Act 20 put in place financial incentives for districts to use rigorous curriculum in line with the phonics-based Science of Reading. The WI DPI assembled an Early Literacy Curriculum Council to evaluate various curricula. Ultimately this council selected 4 programs that met the rigor called for in the state statutes. However, the DPI decided to overrule the council of experts, in my opinion, for political expediency. Now two of the three curricula OASD is considering to pilot next year are absent from the Early Literacy Council's approved list (but are on the DPI's list). It is troubling that we might choose to ignore the recommendations of the experts in the state rather than demanding rigor for the students of Oshkosh.*