

**Oshkosh Chamber of Commerce
Candidate Questionnaire**

Spring Election 2021 – Board of Education, Oshkosh Area School District

Please provide some personal background information.

- Name
Kristopher Karns
- Occupation
Business Office Manager-Advanced Spine Center of Wisconsin- Neenah
- List any community activities you are involved with
Coaching youth sports through the YMCA and Oshkosh United
Oshkosh United Board Member

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?

The primary objective as a school board member is to do what is best for the students, teachers, and community. Education is the most important measure of a community's health. It is the best way to ensure we have smart, educated, thought-provoking, intelligent, compassionate people with the ability to think critically and understand how we are only as strong as our weakest school. As a community, we must come together and work for the equity of all students, regardless of background, race, ethnicity, religion, or gender.

As a parent in the school district I have been disappointed in the current decision making process. Mostly because the communication around the pandemic has been limited and sometimes contradictory. Communication needs to be better and is a place we need to earn back the community's trust.

We also need to address the divide between many groups in the community. It is important to listen to everyone, but some groups are looking at situations from only one perspective. It is vital that we make sure we are looking at issues from all sides and being civil in our discourse on possible solutions to those problems. Civility has been lacking lately and we all need to do a better job.

2. A University of Pennsylvania study estimates that each month of school closures costs students between \$12,000 - \$15,000 in future earnings. Now that the OASD is returning to in-person learning, do you believe the Board of Education remote learning plan was an appropriate response, especially in the current school year, to the Covid-19 situation? Please discuss your answer.

I think it is important to remember we are in a pandemic and we need to be making the best decisions possible when it comes to the health of our community. There are a lot of factors in

play when it comes to safety during a pandemic, with school districts being the safety net in many places.

I also think it is fair to say we had months to prepare for a better opening of the school year back in September 2020. The main issue I have had with it is the lack of clear communication from the district.

3. Long Range Planning - There has been a shortfall of long-range planning and some might say crisis management by planning in three-year strategic plans. With more than a few of our schools at 75+ years, please describe how you plan to completely change the steering process as a member of the OASD so that we are looking and communicating out 20+ years for facilities, preventative annual maintenance and mid- to large-capital needs.

This is an area I am not super familiar with and look forward to learning more about. From what I know we do need to do a better job maintaining our buildings. The community and the school district are closely tied together, so making sure we have great facilities to allow our teachers to teach and our students to learn will have a positive effect in our community.

4. Tech Education - the old Industrial Arts programs - has been slowly going away 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?

Tech Ed programs are important, just like a number of other classes (Art, Science, Phy Ed, Photography, Math, History, English, etc.). We should be doing what we can to educate our students in many areas and making sure they have the offerings that interest them and prepare them to be intelligent members of society.

5. OASD Fund 10 expenditures have grown **\$20,905,000 (a 20.3% increase)** from ~\$102,919,000 in 2015 to \$123,824,000 in the current budget while student enrollment declined by 638 students (6.4% decrease). What measures will you suggest to lower expenses during a period of declining enrollment?

I would love to look at ways to increase revenue and bring back the students that open enrolled out. We should be a destination school for many, and with that comes additional funds. Our city deserves an exceptional school district that educates and graduates amazing, smart and intelligent individuals.

6. Ten years ago, Wisconsin school districts were in dire financial situations. ACT 10 gave local districts the tools to better manage their operations. It addressed the root of Wisconsin's budget problem – unchecked labor costs. It limited collective bargaining for public sector unions to just base salary and wages. Act 10 didn't just fix the state's financial problems. It also gave school districts the tools they needed to keep their budgets balanced. Previously, most school districts were required to buy health insurance through the state teachers union. After Act 10, they were allowed to shop for the best deal. In the past 10 years, Act 10 saved Wisconsin Public schools over \$5.2 billion in

retirement and health care cost. In your opinion, has the OASD fully utilized these provisions? Are there areas that you would suggest the OASD could further cost savings? Do you support maintaining these provisions? Please discuss.

When it comes to the details of the district's finances, I am interested in learning more about what we can do to make our school district more successful. I want to look at how we can support our teachers and give them the tools to be successful. Many great teachers left after Act 10, so what can we do to either bring them back, recruit new teachers, or more importantly, retain the exceptional teachers that we already have? Act 10 may have helped in some areas, but it created a lot of problems as well that school districts are still trying to work through.

7. What reforms, if any, would you support to fund public school operations?

I would want to look at ways that we can focus our investment in our school district in areas that need it. When a community invests in their students (and school district), it comes back in the form of higher property values, empathy for one another, smarter and educated decision makers, and an option for open enrollment from outside the district.

8. The OASD lost student enrollment due to the Covid-19 situation. How do you plan to stop the exodus of children from our district either going to private schools or surrounding districts? How do you plan to make up for the lost dollars from all of the students who have left the district in the last 12 months?

During this pandemic we lost many students due to poor communication from the district. That needs to change immediately. I would also love to look at ways to increase revenue and bring back the students that open enrolled out. We should be a destination school for many, and with that comes additional funds. Our city deserves an exceptional school district that educates and graduates amazing, smart and educated individuals.