

Oshkosh Chamber of Commerce

Candidate Questionnaire

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

Name: Chris Wright

Occupation: Health Care/ Screening Specialist

Community Activities: Current: I am a youth Basketball Coach for OWBC 4th Grade girls team, Prior: Elected official to the Town of Algoma Town Board (2 consecutive terms), Advocap Board of Directors, Winnebago IT committee, Reeve Union Board president, UW Oshkosh Student Board Chairman.

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 responsibilities as a school board member will be to set good policy, to collaborate with all stakeholders within OASD and to make sure that our resources are being allocated properly. The most important things that I've learned from past leadership roles is that you have to set solid policy based on a shared vision. The vision is created through collaboration, listening and community buy in.**
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 appropriate response, especially in the current school year, to the Covid -19 situation? **I believe that we will look back at our remote learning plan as a catastrophic mistake. Other surrounding school districts figured out how to navigate the COVID 19 situation a lot more quickly and efficiently than we did. Because of the unwillingness of our administration and board to innovate and collaborate with local health care leaders our students lost precious educational opportunities, and our community lost trust in OASD leadership. Right now our district is in the middle of a mental health crisis, a student achievement crisis "40 percent of students are failing a class" and an enrollment crisis "a net loss of 400 students have left the district". In my opinion we could've collaborated with local health care providers more quickly and in a more precise manner to put safe plans in place for the kids to return to school.**
3. Long Range Planning- There has been a short fall of long-range planning and some might say crisis management by planning in three-year strategic plans. With more than a few of our school 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. **Our old schools and annual preventative maintenance costs are the by product of decades of poor long-range planning. We need to envision and plan at least 20 years out so that we aren't trying to tackle decades**

of mismanagement in a short period of time. We should complete cost analyses of our building structures and at the same time we should analyze how building locations affect our local economy and the ability for kids to access schools. Based on the data we should determine what buildings should be maintained and what resources should be used to build better and more efficient structures.

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? **We have to make sure that we are preparing our children for the ever-changing workforce. It is our job to ensure that our children are qualified for well paying jobs and to succeed. Some Tech Education jobs pay very well and there is an abundance of need for those skills in our community. Plumbers, carpenters and electricians earn a very good wage. If we are presented with opportunities to enhance our students skills in Tech Education I would personally be in favor of that. I believe an opportunity to attract students back to the district is to look at innovation and exciting classroom opportunities. Our curriculum should not be stagnant but should be a way to engage our students and provide them enrichment opportunities.**

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%). What measure will you suggest to lower expenses during a period of declining enrollment? **At the last school board meeting a current School Board member stated that OASD's recent audit revealed that OASD was overstaffed in comparison to other comparable school districts. I believe that we should be making sure that the bulk of our resources are getting to our teachers and to the direct staff. We have to ensure that our capital is being used to better prepare our students for our everchanging world. If the position isn't providing direct value to our district and student's then we need to ask ourselves the question, "is this position needed and is our capital being used wisely?"**

6. Ten years ago, Wisconsin school districts were in dire financial situations. Act 10 gave local districts the tool 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 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 support maintaining these provisions? Please Discuss? **I think that the school district should use any tool that it has available to them to become better. One idea that could possibly result in potential savings to the school district could be the self-funding of insurance. Many school districts have started to self-fund health insurance to cut down on costs and to provide a better service. If you are a large enough employer like OASD is you can negotiate better**

rates and require a better product to be provided. This is an idea that the current OASD business manager is looking into and I would encourage him to continue to research it. Finding better value can result in cost savings that will allow us to deploy our capital more efficiently. Additionally I believe that our high performing employees should be paid accordingly. A merit system should be put into place so that we can reward our best employee's that go above and beyond. We haven't been doing a great job at retaining high performing employees. Almost always the loss of high performing employee's results in more incurred costs for any employer.

7. What reforms, if any, would you support to fund public school operations? **Right now half of all public school funding is funded through local property taxes. Right now the formula factors in the number of students in a district, the money the district spent on education the prior year, and the property values in the district. The state then allocates more aid to districts with lower property values. Right now there are two different funding formulas being floated. The fair funding formula that would disperse money based on poverty and a model that allows vouchers and school choice. Both of the models are highly partisan so I wouldn't anticipate that we would get any type of new funding model soon without compromise on both sides of the aisle. Ultimately this issue is an issue that will be decided in the legislature. I would like for them to agree upon a model that benefits our students and taxpayers the most. At this time I don't personally know what the compromise could be.**

8. The OASD lost student enrollment due to the COVID 19 situation. How do you plan to stop the exodus or 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 past 12 months? **First and foremost we have to do everything that we can to try and get as many of these children back into our district as possible. We need to have an aggressive campaign to reach out to these students and their families. This campaign will require us to have a clear and concise message highlighting all of the positive things that are occurring within Oshkosh School District. If we aren't able to get the children back into the school district we will have to make cuts. We can't lose a whole school worth of students and maintain the same staffing and service levels without cuts. So it is paramount that we put together a great plan to get our children back into OASD.**