

**Oshkosh Chamber of Commerce  
Candidate Questionnaire**

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

Please provide some personal background information.

- Name - Beth Wyman
- Occupation – Community Volunteer and Small Business Owner (The Waters and Ufit Personal Training)
- List any community activities you are involved with – Currently I am a board member of the UWO Foundation, Oshkosh4Education and the lead the Oshkosh Yacht Club Sailing School Board. In the past I have been on many boards and committees where I have led, fundraised, and advocated for a better and brighter community.

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?

- *First and foremost is to establish a vision. The OASD currently has a strategic plan which helps the district focus on five priority areas, but the bigger questions are who we are, what do we want and how are we going to get there. I want to be “The Public School District of Choice”.*
- *Develop accountability standards for the superintendent.*
- *Review and update policies*
- *Adopt a budget that fits the strategic plan.*
- *Advocate for the district and students*

***Each of these should always keep maximizing student achievement in the forefront.***

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.

*It would be nice to have a crystal ball and always make the right decision, but the board made the decision based on the facts that they believed were appropriate. The item that was missing in the decision-making process was an open dialogue with local health care professionals. Had there been more open dialogue I do not believe the BOE meetings would have gotten as negative and strained.*

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.

*There needs to be more upfront conversation with the community. There is a long range plan which was approved by the board in February 2020, but much of the public has little to no idea that it exists*

<https://www.oshkosh.k12.wi.us/district/communications/district-news/details/~board/news/post/oshkosh-school-board-approves-long-range-facilities-plan>

*It is exciting that the referendum for two new schools passed in November 2020. We have the opportunity to use this as a starting point to rebuild both externally and internally. What is lacking is communication and excitement. The day after the referendum was passed, I would have had a LARGE sign that was installed on the new Merrill property that would have said, "Site of the NEW Merrill Middle School, Thank you Oshkosh". We missed an opportunity to get the community involved and bring them into the fold for the future. We found out just how important community conversation was in the Smith School closing. It was well known within the district, if the roof failed, the school was going to have to close. That information could have been given to the families two years ago so they had time to prepare. We need to take a more proactive approach to communication and believe in our community to see the big picture.*

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?

*I taught business classes at FVTC for over 10 years. The quality of education given to students was stellar. The best part of tech colleges is that they are focused on a career immediately and the time is shorter to graduation and ultimately a career. College is great for some but not for all. To me it is more important to continue to learn post high school in whatever manner is appropriate for the chosen career.*

*It is critical to keep Tech Ed classes alive in the high school. Our current economic structure relies on those careers which are tech related. I'm so excited to see the complete change in the ONHS tech room to the newly created Fab Lab. It is now relevant and will be used. We need to continue to partner with businesses to see what they need from our graduates. If we can give them a quality product, I believe they will help financially support the programs and sites which are critical to everyone's success.*

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?

#### *Reductions*

*It will be difficult to reduce expenses because there just isn't that much fluff in the budget.*

- *Reducing the number of schools will help. Many of our current schools are inefficient and expensive to operate.*
- *It would be easy to say cut teachers salaries, but that is not realistic given they already make about \$10,000 less per year than their neighboring counterparts.*
- *Health insurance costs continue to rise, but given the salary structure in the OASD, it is possibly the one benefit which makes up for the low salary.*

*Additions:*

- ***We need to get students back into our district.** Interestingly enough, I watched the school board meeting with interest last night and at no time did they ever talk about or did the superintendent put out a plan as to how to get students back from private schools, in home learning in another district, other public-school districts for the 2021-2022 school year.*
  - *Talk with legislators about low revenue limit adjustment. Because of the decision made many years ago we are not able to tax at the same levels as some of our neighboring school districts.*
  - *Develop business and community partnerships. When the district can show and prove academic success from our students, community members and businesses will invest time and dollars to increase the chance of future successes. Investors want to invest in a winner and we need to prove as a district that we can be just that. They want to feel welcome, respected and part of something bigger.*
  - *Promote and engage the Oshkosh Education Foundation. Theresa Duren is the new director of the foundation and she is poised to make a difference. The foundation has the opportunity to fund raise for short term needs and to build an endowment which will fund projects well into the future.*
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.

*The positive part of ACT 10 was that it gave power back to the teachers. They are now able to be autonomous and manage their day without someone looking over their shoulder. Some may say that ACT 10 did not go far enough in cutting retirement benefits. However, this is one area that helps us retain staff. Especially true in our district where our salaries are substantially less than our neighboring counterparts. I do think retirement benefits for those reaching age 55 could be revisited. Because people are living longer, 55 seems to be a young age for full retirement.*

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

*The state needs to continue to look at reforms for the following:*

- *Per pupil funding – In some cases it doesn't make the impact that it should. This is especially true in our district where education may require more funds based on needs of the students.*
- *State education formula – Is based on only property value. That may not be the best measure of need for a district. It is also a difficult measure when the enrollment is declining in a district. The need for education is still there but the district takes a funding hit.*
- *School Choice – The voucher program for private and not in district charter schools stretches resources for public schools very thin.*

*All of these items need to be looked at so we are funding in a smart manner. There will always be challenges but just like everything else, reform is critical to maintaining a current and effective public education system.*

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 make up for the lost dollars from all of the students who have left the district in the last 12 months?

*We need to have a plan to reengage families which have left the district. Students equate to dollars. In order to do that we need to be THE PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT OF CHOICE.*

- *Recreate a positive culture for teachers, families, and all stakeholders.*
- *Determine which learning mediums are appropriate for each child.*
- *Determine which classes, which students and what curriculum can be taught differently to maximize learning which is very exciting.*
- *Reengage with businesses to determine we are teaching classes that will benefit the student in the future.*
- *Implement a learning plan for each student. It is more work for the teachers initially but the benefits for the student are great.*
- *Engage families throughout the district to encourage participation and two-way communication.*
- *Reinvigorate PTOs at each school and community wide PTO.*
- *Set up town hall meetings to have two-way dialogue between community members and the district. Understand and listen to their concerns. Being proactive increases understanding and reduces negativity and misinformation.*
- *Reengage Oshosh4Education. They are not a threat but rather a community advocate group which reaches far and wide.*
- *Let Katie Nieman, the marketing manager run with a campaign to promote the district. We need to be much more proactive and positive.*

