

**Orange County Board of Education
Candidate Questionnaire
Sponsored by Orange County Voice**

Personal Profile

Name: Will Atherton

Position Sought: *Orange County School Board*

Incumbent (y/n): N

Education/Professional Background:

Education

- * 1997 BS, Electrical Engineering
McNeese State University
Lake Charles, LA
- * 1997 BS, Electronic Technology
McNeese State University
Lake Charles, LA
- * 1997 Math Minor
McNeese State University
Lake Charles, LA

- * 2003 MS, Computer Network Engineering
North Carolina State University
Raleigh, NC

Professional

- * Senior Technical Staff Member/Engineer, IBM
- * Master Inventor, IBM
- * Over 12 years of Experience in Multi-million dollar budget
- * Senior Member, Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers
- * Microsoft Certified System Engineer
- * A+ Certified Software Engineer
- * Awarded 11 US patents
- * Received numerous awards for technical achievement
- * Percussion/Drum Core Instructor at Sulphur High School
- * Math Lab Instructor (Remedial Math) at McNeese State University
- * Career path presentation given to NC State College Students
- * Presents at industry standard events (PCI.org, Blade.org, Featured in T&M)

Community Activities

- * Chair, Sportsplex Community Advisory Committee for Orange County Board Commissioners

- * President, Board of Directors Churton Grove Homeowners Association

- * Active PTA Member Hillsborough Elementary School
- * Classroom, Book Fare, Carnival , Volunteer
- * HYAA/Upward Coach and/or Volunteer

More information → www.willforschools.com or www.WillAtherton.com

Questions

1. **What skills/training do you bring to the table that can benefit Orange County students? If you have served on the board previously, why do you want to serve again?**

I believe in being open-minded and maintaining strong conviction with “hands-on” fact finding before making any decision.

Community involvement has always been a high priority for me. I have served on board of directors for the Churton Grove Homeowners’ Association over the last 8 years, where I was recently voted as the president of the HOA. As a board member and now the president I am responsible for all of our community business. I have focused on fiscal responsibility as I am responsible for the budgets and insuring dues are kept at a minimum. One key item for me has been “Buy Local” to support our community. By contract, the Churton Grove management company is required to use local businesses and resources to support the neighborhood. Other key items of focus are insuring safety of our community and handling the concerns of all community members with fair mindedness. I believe my experience in working for my neighborhood has given me direct experience on finance, budget, working with the community and insuring everyone has a voice.

In 2009, I was named chair for the Sportsplex Community Advisory Committee for the Orange County Board of Commissioners. I have been an active member over the past 3 years and have focused on gaining better accessibility and affordability for all Orange County residents. I have been very active in the processes and cost associations for the KidsPlex programs and membership. This has changed the way the process and procedures are being handled today. We worked with the County during planning and design of the Senior Center, and provided input during construction. This has given me direct experience working with the community, different groups within the county and the Orange County Board of Commissioners.

As a volunteer in local sports activities and classroom environments, I have gained insight into the way children interact and learn. I believe fostering positive, structured environments will allow children to be successful, in whatever capacity works best for their particular learning needs.

While completing my under-graduate studies at McNeese State University, I volunteered as a remedial math lab instructor, as well as a Percussion/Drum Core Instructor at a local High School. These experiences have shown me how important basic learning tools are in the success of our students. Enrichment and extra-curricular activities foster core values and responsibility in students, and implementing and sustaining these types of programs can lead to confidence and success with our students.

My position as an engineer with a global firm has offered experience working with colleges, companies and customers worldwide. My travels abroad have given me a unique view in the ever-changing marketplace. Developing multi-million dollar budgets, and subsequent budget cuts and trade-offs, gives me the advantage of seeing real-world application and impact of plans developed throughout the system. My background in research, development, data analysis and fact finding leads to a practical approach in budget planning. Innovation thinking and practicality is key to success in Orange County Schools.

2. In your view, what is the primary responsibility of the School Board and what should its goals be?

The primary responsibility of the School Board is to set policy and give direction for the School system. This includes things such as approval of hiring, budgets and setting the priorities. I feel it is the Board's job to also measure and determine the effectiveness of the policies. The Board should NOT handle day to day activities and need to insure issues are handled through the proper chain (teacher, School, central office, etc..)

The main goal for the school board should be to educate **all** of the children and insure that teachers and staffs have the "tools" to do so. The board needs to make it a priority that teachers are given the ability to grow in their profession and collaborate.

3. What three programs that directly affect student achievement are working best in Orange County Schools? What programs need the most improvement? How would you improve them?

1. The Drop-out School retention program, which has show significant results this year ranking us in the top 10 for graduation rates in North Carolina. 2. Pre-K program has grown and gives a high-quality pre-k program for children who are at risk and prepares them for success from the start in our school system. 3. AIG

program has been growing, as we have a larger number of AIG students than the state average. This program is needed to keep students engaged AND increase the diversity in these programs.

One item that needs improvement is the achievement gap. We need to focus on insuring that we are educating the child based on his or her needs. We need to insure that we are putting the right resources where they are needed.

4. How would you prioritize areas of spending for the Orange County School budget? If funding was cut, where would you cut spending?

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Education of the children is the first priority. Insure we are not taking resources away from the children who need it the most. Safety and security cannot be cut either.

When the funding is cut I would review the administrations recommendation, review each item, review the impact and WHO it affects. I would also ask to look at how we insure these items do not affect the base education of the child, such as reading, writing and Math. I also feel that the extra-curricular activities (Art, Band, sports, etc...) are some of the major motivators to get kids on the bus and at school and should not be the first target.

5. Do you feel that the amount of parental involvement allowed or encouraged with teachers and coaches is more than enough, less than enough or about right? Why?

I have not met a teacher, Coach, or staff member that has ever said "I have more than enough parent involvement". I know for all the thank-less work that teachers do they need as much parent involvement as possible at all levels of school. Whether it is the parent volunteering in the class room or supporting the teacher by making sure each child is prepared for class and had the material needed to be productive in the class room. I think given the dire economy where in our teach need MORE support.

6. The legislature recently decided to add age-appropriate sex education for the public school in addition to abstinence only programs. Do you support this? Why/why not?

This is not tentative legislation and is law now. It's not a matter of opinion anymore. However, I feel it is critical to insure this program is presented in a manner that it is NOT promoting nor forgetting how impressionable our children are.

7. Is bullying a problem at OCS? If yes, what would you do to improve this?

Any bullying is a problem, although we are not seeing at the school board level reports of bullying, the school board must insure a SAFE learning environment. I believe board policy must include insuring children have a safe method of reporting any case of bullying and in a manner that the child would not choose to endure the bullying rather than report it or worse drop out of school.

8. The school bus system is important to rural residents who lack neighborhood schools. Some of our children are on the bus for more than one hour to get to school. We are also concerned about their safety on the bus

a. What is a reasonable amount of time for students to be on the school bus before the first school bell rings?

i. Elementary Student? Goal to be less than an Hour

ii. Middle School Student? Goal to be less than an hour

iii. High School Student? Goal to be less than an hour

Note that I am saying that would be the reasonable time, but I am aware that we have over 300 square miles here in the OCS and that we have a limited number of buses to cover the whole county at this time. We need to keep looking at ways to allow us to decrease the current time and get more buses to help reduce the overall time.

b. Should new school buses have seat belts? Why/why not?

There is conflicting research on this issue as some research shows that if a bus continuously travel above 45 MPH this could have saved a life, while others says that there is no difference. I think on routes that are continuously over 45 MPH it should be looked at.

- 9. Legal, moral and ethical issues are a fact of life and provide important teaching moments for our students. Is the current code of conduct working? What is the board's role in assuring that legal/ethical issues involving faculty, staff or board members are handed fairly and expeditiously, with minimal distraction?**

The code of conduct is written in a way that we should not have any issues. I believe that how issues are handled in some cases is "the issue". Where the board has too much knowledge about an issue it is expected to make a decision on..

I believe that board should focus on insuring that the emotions are removed from decision process and that the board follows its own process. The board should hear all sides of the issues and insure that code of conduct penalties are followed and are consistent if required. I also feel that the attorney should not be involved in every response.