

**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.

**Orange County Board of Education
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Personal Profile

Name: Donna Coffey

Position Sought: Orange County School Board

Incumbent (y/n): N

Education/Professional Background:

- *Education: AAS, Accounting from Alamance Community College; Attended North Carolina Central University for 2 years*

- *Occupation: Retired from Orange County Local Government in October 2009 after serving almost 30 years in a number of financial and budget related positions; most recent appointment was Budget Director for the County, a position held for more than 12 years*

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?

The opportunity to serve on the Board of Education allows me to make the most of my life experiences, sound judgement, and professional knowledge.

One of my most prominent assets is I understand school finance and budget issues. I recently had the opportunity to retire from Orange County Local Government after almost thirty years of public service. During my tenure, I served in a number of finance and budget-related positions with my most recent appointment being Budget Director – a position I held for more than twelve years. In that capacity, I oversaw the multi-million dollar day-to-day operating budget and ten-year Capital Investment Plan for the County. Since about fifty percent of the County's resources are dedicated to funding local school districts, I gained much insight into school finances, policies and needs. In addition, I was staff advisor to a number of Commissioner-appointed committees related to school operational and capital needs and funding. I have also served on, and learned much from, several state committees dedicated to public education and local taxation and finance.

My local government budgeting experience will allow me to help ensure funding priorities

are properly identified and used to build the best system possible in an environment of reduced resources.

I have not previously served on the School Board or any other political office.

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

In my opinion, the two most important responsibilities of the Board are:

- Guide the direction of the district by setting policies and goals that adhere to state, federal and local laws and community values
- Hire and evaluate the superintendent and ensure the district is managed well by professionals

The role of the School Board is often misunderstood by the public and sometimes by board members themselves. I believe it is important to emphasize that it is not the Board's responsibility to become involved in school administration or make administrative decisions. The superintendent is the chief administrator; the board has no administrative function.

The Board's goals should reflect an understanding of the community as a whole and respect its diverse cultures. An effective board is one that is committed to providing the best possible public education for all students, families and the community as a whole. They also do not allow personal feelings towards others to affect their judgement nor do they represent interests of special groups of individuals.

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?

I believe it is clear that measures enacted over the last few years (community learning centers, benchmarking, increased technology in the classroom, early intervention, etc.) have affected student achievement since analysis shows not only is the achievement gap narrowing, students at all levels are performing better. In addition, more than 81% of our seniors successfully completed high school – placing Orange County almost 10% above the state average.

While this news is positive, it is clear there is more work to do. In order for this trend to continue, the District must not only expand programs already in place, such as parental involvement, community learning centers and free middle school afterschool programs, it must also focus on intense early intervention along with recruitment and retention of more diverse teaching staff, and alternative learning opportunities and environments.

For me, one of the priorities would be offering alternative learning opportunities for students. In particular, I would like the district to explore learning centers for students on short-term suspension and non-traditional learning opportunities for students who are employed.

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

In my opinion, the district should dedicate the bulk of its resources to the classroom and to technology to ensure each student has the opportunity to succeed. Funding reductions would need to occur in areas where it would have the least impact on students. One of the first steps would be to look at all programs and services to determine which ones are core (mandated) and which ones are discretionary. Clearly, the district would not be able to reduce mandated services, but there may be some flexibility in funding discretionary, or non-mandated, programs and services. Another area to analyze would be capital expenditures – to determine if there are particular non-critical projects that could potentially be postponed for a year or two.

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?

From my personal experience, I have found, for the most part, all school personnel welcome parental involvement whether it is in the form of a phone call, email or personal visit. I realize “free” or non-classroom time is limited, and sometimes it may take a little longer than I expected for them to get back with me, but all-in-all, I have had good experiences.

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?

The “Healthy Youth Act of 2009” requires school districts to offer a comprehensive, age-appropriate, fact-based, scientific sex education curriculum that includes Federal Drug Administration approved information about ways to prevent pregnancy, including abstinence, transmission and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, and sexual abuse and assault. It is also important to note that parents have the option to remove their child from the program if they choose to do so.

I believe the more informed children are, like adults, the better choices they will make. I believe, in addition to the curriculum offered by our schools, sex education also involves teaching children personal values in the home, in faith communities, and in our society as a whole.

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

I believe bullying exists in Orange County Schools. In addition to physical and mental bullying, I believe cyber-bullying is becoming more of a problem as social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace becomes more popular. In December 2009, the Board of Education adopted policies prohibiting discrimination, harassment and bullying. Since the policies were adopted fairly recently, I do not think they should be updated this soon. I do believe, however, the Board should receive periodic staff reports on bullying in the schools to determine the effectiveness of the recently enacted policies. As additional information becomes available, the Board may, or may not, see a need to possibly amend the policy.

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?** no more than 1 ¼ hours
- ii. **Middle School Student?** no more than 1 ¼ hours
- iii. **High School Student?** no more than 1 ¼ hours

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

The State of North Carolina does not require school buses to have seat belts installed. I have read statistics on both sides of the issue. For example, according to the School Bus Information Clearinghouse:

“Modern school buses (those manufactured after April 1, 1977) are equipped with more safety equipment than any other vehicle on the road. This is by design because safety regulators and state pupil transportation officials always err on the side of providing an extra margin of safety. The size of the school bus alone gives it an important advantage in all but the most catastrophic circumstances. Key federal safety requirements include:

- *Special passenger crash protection: Well-padded, high-back, energy-absorbing seats, as well as special requirements for wheelchair restraint systems. These seating systems provide “automatic protection” for young passengers. Additionally, school bus interiors are designed to reduce the chances of injury caused by sharp edges or body panels that may tear loose in a crash.”*

Statistics from the National Transportation Safety Board indicate that, nationwide, an average of 11 passengers per year (since 1984) have died in school bus crashes.

On the other hand, there are a number of studies that encourage the use of seat belts on school buses.

All these things said, I would need much more analytical information before forming an opinion one way or the other.

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 handled fairly and expeditiously, with minimal distraction?

As leaders in our community, Board members of all elected offices serve as role models and are expected to comply with state statutes and ethics. With that said, it is important to note confidential personnel matters are allowed by statute and are to be discussed "in closed session" until such time it is legally allowable for the information to become public.

Orange County Board of Education Candidate Questionnaire

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Personal Profile

Name: Keith Cook
Position Sought: *Orange County School Board*
Incumbent (y/n): No
Education: Completed Coursework in Business/Finance at Fayetteville State in Fayetteville, NC
Professional Background: Retired Financial Consultant, Certified Estate Planner, and Senior Advisor

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?**

Response: My skills/training as a former school board member of 10 years for Orange County Schools; my eight years as former chair of the Orange County Middle Schools Afterschool Program for Orange County Schools and Chapel Hill Carrboro City Schools; my three years as the current co-chair of a non-profit educational organization called the Northern Orange Education Task Force (NOETF) which also includes opening the first church-based community learning centers; and my involvement on various district committees that focus on closing the achievement gap and reducing the dropout and suspension rates all demonstrate my strong background and experience in serving our youth in different capacities as well as my continued dedication and commitment to educational excellence for ALL children. These experiences are why I want to be actively involved once again in helping the Orange County School Board direct the future path of the district in all areas that impact teaching and learning.

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

Response: The role of school boards has changed over time as the structure of public education has changed. I believe the responsibilities of the school board are to hire the superintendent, set policy, give direction, provide a vision for the district, respond to local concerns, and make budget decisions. The primary goals are ensuring high student achievement in safe, nurturing school environments and

providing fiscal accountability and transparency. The school board should also engage in ongoing evaluation of the superintendent and administration as well as self evaluation, and of course, attend board training and professional development. Lastly, I believe that one of the most important task of a school board is to “set the tone” for the district’s priorities and to promote communication within and outside the school district.

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?

Response: Based on presentations recently heard at school board meetings, the three programs that seem to be working to improve student achievement include district literacy efforts, professional learning communities, and schools having data driven goals and strategies that focus on student growth in math, reading, and writing.

There is always room for improvement in every program area. But as of this moment, I don’t have any evidence or knowledge to responsibly say right now what programs need the most improvement or how I would improve them. If I’m elected I expect to spend time assessing which programs are working to improve student achievement and which ones are not. Improving them will be based on that feedback, input from others regarding their thoughts, what research says is best to support teaching and learning, and what can be realistically done fiscally and programmatic to make any possible changes.

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

Response: Prioritizing spending areas would be based on feedback first from the expected state and county appropriation; from schools regarding their needs for supporting teaching and learning; from the district Superintendent regarding their efforts to support teaching and learning and any capital improvements; and from a board review of all these spending needs that will be prioritized based on programmatic, health and safety, and capital improvement mandates, and the expected county appropriations. Though it all at all levels there is parent input.

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?

Response: I don't think anyone can dictate to parents how much involvement they should have with any school personnel if the parent's contact is about their own child's needs regardless of what those needs might be. Staying involved with a child's schooling is a parent's right and responsibility and that is why schools should find creative ways to encourage parent involvement from kindergarten through high school in and out of the classroom. I also think both parents and schools can always do more as partners to support students academically and otherwise. With that said, there should also be clear protocols to make sure that the interactions are appropriate and constructive.

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?

Response: I support the Healthy Youth Act 2009 for students in grades 7 through 9 because students will continue to learn about abstinence until marriage within the context of a comprehensive sexuality program. My understanding is that any information presented to students about reproductive health and safety related topics will be accurate, research-based, and give parents the right to review all materials and withdraw their child from the program if they feel uncomfortable having someone else teach their child about this topic.

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

Response: I think all school districts, including OCS, have situations that might involve a student at one point or another being bullied or harassed by other students until the victim hates coming to school to learn. In 2004 as a former board member I served on a committee to draft the district's first anti-bullying policy, which was approved in May 2004 in response to a serious bullying matter. As a potential school board member, I would expect our school leaders to prevent bullying among students and its employees by complying with all requirements of the new School Violence Prevention Act. As a potential school board member, my job will be to monitor how the district is complying with this new law, to ensure students, parents and staff that the bullying and harassment policy will be enforced, and that the district will have a plan to promote school environments that are bully and

harassment free, including strategies to address any concerns. I would also encourage more mediation, especially peer mediation at the middle and high school levels.

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? Response: Unknown to me**
- ii. Middle School Student? Response: Unknown to me**
- iii. High School Student? Response: Unknown to me**

I don't know what is reasonable for a mostly rural community when you look at how far some Northern Orange communities are from the nearest schools that students in those communities should attend. I would want to do more research on best practices in a rural community but ideally I would like to think students should not be on a bus more much more than an hour.

There is something that can be done if the district can collaborate with parents about their concerns and address them the best they can about, why and what would it take to allow their child to ride on the school buses provided for them. I have heard a concern myself from parents, not wanting to leave their child either at home along or outside with no protection in the mornings. If those issues could be solved and parents allowed more of their children to ride the bus back and forth to school the school district would be authorized additional buses for the increased riders, there by lessening the distance the buses would have to travel to provide service for bus riding students and hopefully quicker.

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

Response: I believe that all of the newer buses that students ride should have seat belts on them for safety reasons, especially for the younger students. I do not believe the district should budget money to install seat belts on any of our older buses.

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 handled fairly and expeditiously, with minimal distraction?**

Response: In terms of the current code of conduct, if the district is complying with its board approved policy of rules and expectations and the board ensures compliance; if administrators are applying rules and expectations for all students who violate any part of the code of conduct in a consistent and fair manner; and if the code of conduct is communicated regularly to all those who are impacted by this board policy, including how to appeal, so that everyone understands what is expected, then the current code of conduct is working. If applying the code of conduct is not being handled in the ways I just mentioned then the board needs to re-examine why and then come up with a plan to address the problem areas.

The board's role in handling legal/ethical issues is to hear the facts from the appropriate parties; get advice from the board attorney about the best way to handle any issue involving faculty, staff or board member fairly and quickly with minimal distraction; discuss how to move forward following attorney input; and then reach board consensus on the plan to address the legal/ethical issue. Once there is board consensus, then if appropriate, the superintendent and human resources should handle the matter involving staff. Regarding the board member, the same process should be used except the board member in question should be removed from any board discussion once the facts have been reviewed by the attorney.

**Orange County Board of Education
Candidate Questionnaire
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Personal Profile

Name: Anne Medenblik

Position Sought: *Orange County School Board*

Incumbent (y/n): Yes

Education/Professional Background:

B.A., Business Education; was a certified teacher for grades 7-12; taught high school accounting, business law, general business and office skills

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? Response:

- Currently serving as chair of the Orange County Board of Education; served 4 years on this board
- My two children have attended Orange County Schools since kindergarten; my son is a junior and my daughter is a freshman
- Former high school teacher and coach; accounting and business management skills for analysis of fiscal matters and budgets; accountant for large corporation
- Orange County Schools' Middle School Task Force member
- Served on Orange County Schools Health Advisory Committee (SHAC)
- Partnership Academy Advisory Board member
- Legislative Liaison member of the Orange County Board of Education
- Member, Christian Education Committee at my church
- Battle of the Books Coach
- Math Superstars coordinator
- 12 year volunteer in Orange County Schools
- PTA Executive Committee member
- Girl Scout leader for 7 years

I attended public schools; my children attend Orange County Schools; and, I am willing to serve again because I want to give back to a community that provides a quality education for my children. Serving on the board has allows me to honor that commitment.

Our annual report to the community summarizes the significant progress Orange County Schools has achieved:

*The proficiency rate on the on the **Reading End-of-Grade (EOG)** test for grades 3-8 has increased by 11.5% to 74.5% last year. The proficiency rate on the **Mathematics EOGs** increased nearly 7% to 85% and by nearly 19% in the area of science. Orange County Schools' students made improvements on the high school **End-of-Course (EOC) assessments**, demonstrating an increased proficiency on seven of the ten EOC tests. Our students also scored above the state and national average in all demographic groups on both the **SAT and ACT**. All schools made "Expected Growth" or "High Growth" on North Carolina's ABCs of Public Education and three schools were named as "Schools of Distinction." District-wide, Orange County Schools met 49 of its 54 target goals for a 90.7% proficiency rate, an increase of 5.7% from the year before. **The district is also making significant progress towards closing the achievement gap.** In reading, grades 3-8, the gap between minority and white students has decreased in four of the six grade levels. In mathematics, the gap between students decreased in all six of the grade levels. The district is committed to ensuring that all students are successful and are actively working with the community to raise the achievement of all students. Finally, and most importantly, the district's graduation rate increased by 6.1% for the 2008-09 school year. Last year, 81.4% of our seniors successfully completed high school. **The graduation rate for Orange County Schools is 9.7% higher than the state average and places our district in the "top 10" of all districts in the state.** We are graduating more seniors than at any time in recent memory and more of those students are deciding to further their education.*

If re-elected, it will be my goal to continue this exciting and excellent progress.

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

The School Board's primary responsibility, by law, is to "provide an adequate school system" See NC General Statute 115C-47 (1). I believe the board's responsibility is to provide excellent, not adequate, educational opportunities for students. Local school boards govern by

- a) developing policy, b) approving the budget and set priorities, c) hiring the superintendent; and d) approving all hiring in the school system.

The current board recently adopted, and I voted for approval of this goal/mission:

Orange County Schools, in partnership with students, families and the community, is committed to providing challenging and engaging educational experiences that will develop responsible, knowledgeable and resourceful citizens prepared to contribute to our global society.

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? Response

As a former teacher, I believe that placing a superstar teacher in every classroom will affect student achievement more than any other program we institute. Programs directed toward recruiting and retaining excellent teachers will have my support.

I believe our balanced literacy program and use of literacy coaches has made, and will continue to make, a significant impact on student achievement.

I believe the funds directed to the preschool programs this board initiated over the past years will directly impact student achievement for the following 13 years they will be students in the system.

Orange County Schools met 49 of its 54 target goals for a 90.7% proficiency rate, an increase of 5.7% from the year before. While these statistics are moving in the right direction and many school districts would be envious of our district's proficiency, as a board member we want all of schools and all of our students to be proficient. We will continue to target those students who need assistance.

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

In order to have excellent schools we must recruit and retain excellent teachers. We allocate local funding to provide supplements to our teachers, and I believe this supplement has paid dividends. We also have more national board certified teachers than most of our surrounding districts.

Federal and state funding formulas are used to allocate resources based on free and reduced lunch status, the number of level I and II students, disabled, gifted, and many other special needs. In addition to that funding, and as mentioned before in this questionnaire, we have targeted local funds toward our special populations. The current board and I recognized there were gaps in funding for technology. Technology becomes obsolete in a short period of time. We have used local funds to bring more current technology into the classrooms.

Projections show we may not need to build new schools for the next ten years. With no major capital funding projects on the horizon, I have advocated and will continue to advocate for local funding to renovate and maintain our aging schools, many of them 40 and 50 years old.

If there is an overfunded budget item, I would encourage someone to point it out to me. We have closely scrutinized and trimmed the budget over the past several years. If there were to be more cuts, my hope is that we would look more closely scrutinize administrative costs. While they have already been cut drastically, I still would want to protect our low teacher/ student ratios.

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? Response:

While the board strongly supports parental and community involvement, the amount of parental involvement is often guided by school level personnel. An effective teacher or coach knows the value of obtaining buy-in from families and should seek that support. Research shows the student will obtain the most benefit when teachers and coaches are collaborating with families to provide educational opportunities. Parent involvement is difficult to quantify since it can vary between teachers and schools. These vital relationships should be encouraged and more involvement can only be beneficial for all parties.

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? Response:

As a member of the board of education, I must uphold the North Carolina Curriculum. It is my understanding there will be two tracks—one will be focused on abstinence and the other on comprehensive sex education. Most importantly, parents will continue to have the right to opt their child out of these units. Our schools should notify parents about these type of programs, notifying them what is being taught and when, in the hopes the parents can continue the discussions at home.

I attended one of these parent informational meetings held at Gravelly Hill Middle School. It was well attended, the parents asked excellent questions, and I believe we are informing and encouraging our students to make the right choices.

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

If one person is bullied, it is a problem. On the other hand, our statistics do not bear out that we have a bullying problem districtwide. During my board tenure we examined bullying policies from across the state and nation before approving a new bullying policy. We early on recognized the need for clear policies that included protecting some of our most vulnerable students. We have also instituted staff development to deal with bullying behaviors. We know that preventing bullying protects school from violence.

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?** Response:
- ii. Middle School Student?** Response
- iii. High School Student?** Response:

Common sense would dictate that an older student would have a longer attention span and more patience to deal with a long bus ride than a younger student. In reality, the age of the student does not dictate the length of the bus ride. Rather, their place of residence dictates the time they will spend on a bus ride. We have a predominantly rural school district and many of our students live near the Chatham, Alamance, Person and Durham county lines. Geography dictates that these students will have longer bus rides. We experimented with express busses. These express busses would pick up students who lived in the far reaches of the county and then drive them straight to the schools. After analyzing ridership, this method proved to be cost prohibitive. I would be very concerned if a student was riding a bus for longer than 75 minutes. We know long bus rides can affect the students ability to learn, the family life, and also the parents' and students' participation in extra-curricular activities. We must be cognizant of all of these aspects of a student's life and also place value on the student's time.

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

I would tend to agree with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's statement that "large school buses are already very safe" and that states should be permitted the choice of deciding whether belts are necessary. The NHTSA also cites this statistic: the school bus occupant fatality rate of 0.23 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles traveled, is more than six times lower than the overall rate for motor vehicles of 1.5 per million vehicle miles traveled.

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 handled fairly and expeditiously, with minimal distraction? Response:

If you are asking about our Student Discipline and Code of Conduct Policy, I have no indications there have been difficulties with the policy. The board's role is to create policy, and we have a grievance policy in place for faculty and staff members to appeal any decision they may feel is unfair. The board of education also has a board attorney who handles the legal matters of the board, attends all board meetings and hearings.

I signed and uphold the School Board Member's Code of Ethics, and believe this code should guide board members when there are legal/ethical issues involving faculty, staff or board members. I would like to reiterate item #15 of this code: "our first and greatest concern must be the educational welfare of the students attending the public schools."

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

Personal Profile

Name: Laura Nicholson

Position Sought: *Orange County School Board*

Incumbent (y/n): No

Education/Professional Background:

Education: Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology from UNC-CH (2001)

Professional Background: Vice President of Operations for Signature Brands (2002-present)

- ◆ Responsible for Day-to-Day Operations for Small Pharmaceutical company
- ◆ Manage employees from KY to FL
- ◆ Oversee and control multi-million dollar budget
- ◆ Use creative Problem-Solving to tackle complex issues on a daily basis

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? Response:**

I have been a volunteer for Orange County Schools for nearly a decade. I am also a parent with 2 children who attend Central Elementary. My passion to help ALL students has driven me to help create 3 after-school clubs at Central Elementary. I was instrumental in beginning the first AAA Safety Patrol in the district and helped form one of the first Elementary-Level Robotics Clubs in the district. I also formed the K-2 Science Club, a curriculum-based after-school club which serves 66 students (almost half of the K-2 students at CES are enrolled in my Science Club).

On a District Level, I formed the OCS Parent Council. This collaborative group represents all Parent Groups within Orange County Schools and helps to plug parents into a community network.

I also have experience reading and tackling complex budgetary issues and have had to balance spending cuts and possible employee losses in my

current position with Signature Brands. I am no stranger to making tough decisions during these difficult economic conditions.

I will bring the following characteristics and skills to the OCS School Board: passion, integrity, advocacy, fairness, critical thinking, and the ability to listen to ALL sides. These traits will enable me to succeed on the School Board , welcome and listen to Parent concerns, and help involve the community in our schools.

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

The primary responsibilities of the School Board are to set policies, provide oversight, lead and inspire.

It is our job as School Board members to lead our schools in the right direction and be a positive role model while setting policies that all our schools will follow.

- 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? Response**

Orange County Schools has partnered with the Northern Orange Education Taskforce to create Community Learning Centers (CLC's) which help at-risk students at New Hope, Central, and Efland-Cheeks. These CLC's meet afterschool and help students learn problem-solving skills with hands-on and creative solutions.

Early intervention is Key and OCS has also implemented several Pre-K classrooms around the district. These classrooms are nurturing environments that help our students succeed and teach them important skills at an early age.

The AVID Program (Advancement Via Personal Determination) is another District success story. Through the AVID Program, our students learn problem-solving skills that help them to think critically and encourage students to succeed despite challenges they may be facing.

These 3 programs are working well in Orange County Schools and helping our students to gain a competitive edge. Regarding improvement, our district needs to expand the CLC's to serve all 7 Elementary Schools and continue to

set goals which support Early Intervention and Increased Student Achievement. These goals can be achieved despite the economic conditions if we are able to use creative problem solving and leverage community support to make sure important programs are not cut from our budget. The CLC's, for example, are often housed in local churches. This partnership allows the community to support effective curriculum-based programs and does not tax the school system to provide every dollar needed to keep these programs alive.

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

I think we need to look critically at all the current spending in the Orange County Schools recommended 2010-2011 Budget . Right now, there may be areas where we could stretch our dollars further but the Public Version of the proposed budget is overarching and vague. I have set and analyzed budgets in my job for 8 years and even I don't see the whole budget picture because the 43-page budget document does not show details about exactly where our tax dollars are being spent. Bottom line, the School Board must do a better job of being transparent and open to the community. Our community members have a right to see where each dollar is being spent and to voice their opinions on how they think funds should be used.

Regarding potential cuts in funding, I think the School Board needs to make their priorities very clear. We need to assess which areas are MOST important and areas where we could cut funding without affecting our quality of education. I think teachers are essential to the system and I do not want to see any further teacher cuts unless they are absolutely necessary. I also feel that we cannot sacrifice funding for our AIG or EC programs. We need to make sure that we educate ALL children equally and I will fight to make sure every child has equal access to education. If we don't have money in the budget to pay for our priorities, then we need to get creative. The School Board must leverage the community and problem-solve ways to keep important programs despite budget shortfalls. I faced a similar problem at Central Elementary when I started our K-2 Science Club. The parents recognized the need for an after-school club and banded together to provide the resources to get this program off the ground. If we can make such wonderful progress with parents in our poorest school, just imagine what we can accomplish with the weight of the School Board behind us!

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? Response:

Parent Involvement is the single best predictor of student success (you can see links on my website to studies that will back up this claim at www.lauranforscheelboard.com). Parent Involvement has a higher effect than IQ, student preparedness, etc. I cannot say enough times how important it is for parents to reinforce the importance of school to their children and celebrate school accomplishments. With that being said, the district has made efforts to involve parents but there is SO MUCH MORE that can be done. We need to be open and welcoming as a School Board and provide opportunities to equip parents with the needed tools to help their students succeed. If the District can do a better job of involving parents, we will find that this helps to close the Achievement Gap, gives us a better view of parent needs and concerns within the district, and makes our students and schools even more successful!

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? Response:

As a parent, I want to keep my child innocent for as long as possible. HOWEVER, as a board member, we must address the fact that our students are entering in to sexual maturity at an earlier age than previous generations. The School Board cannot be blind to the trends and must work hard to address these issues. I think that age appropriate sex education can help to reach our students and teach them about abstinence and other options. If we don't teach them and the parents don't teach them, then they will only learn from peer and media influences. I also understand the importance of parent participation in the decision-making process for sex education and am an advocate for Parents choosing what is appropriate for their children. We need to give parents an option to opt-out of programs that they do not feel are appropriate BUT stress the importance of addressing these issues. Whether I am comfortable or not with sex education as a parent, I know that we must help our students learn to make GOOD DECISIONS for their future. Education and awareness are the best way to prepare our students for what lies ahead!

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

Response:

Bullying is a problem at EVERY school in our nation. I have attended many state-wide conferences which have addressed this issue and provided problem-solving ideas. What's more alarming than recognizing that bullying exists is admitting that this is a problem in Elementary School as well as Middle and High School. The key to controlling bullies in our schools is education. We need to educate our children on proper conflict resolution strategies and let them know WHEN to get a teacher or other adult involved. We need to properly supervise our children in order to make sure that bullying is not happening right under our nose. And we need to educate our parents to help them understand the signs and dangers if their child is being bullied or bullying others. If we can rally the support of students, parents, and teachers, we can control and seek to eliminate bullying in OCS Schools.

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? Response:**
- ii. Middle School Student? Response**
- iii. High School Student? Response:**

I wish that this issue were Black and White so that I could put a number in the above categories. However, our buses travel several hundred miles per day to pick up students and even in a car, it can take 45 minutes to go from the outermost parts of the county to the nearest schools. A few years ago, the School Board convened a taskforce to look into school bus routes and provide suggestions. This taskforce was comprised of staff, parents, and community members who worked very hard and make recommendations to the School Board on creative ideas to shorten bus routes for our rural students. HOWEVER, the School Board did not adopt many of the recommendations and this problem remains unchanged. As a School Board member, I want to make SURE we address the long Bus Routes for our students and propose creative solutions that can work to shorten bus routes in the out reaches of Orange County. We must listen to parent concerns and address these issues on a district level!

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

There are many studies that tout the importance of seat belts on school buses and the evidence is clear. Seat belts are a safer alternative for our students hands down. While I don't see any "wigggle room" in the current budget that could be used to purchase seat belts or new buses that include seat belts, I do feel that this item could be best addressed by writing a Grant. We could seek a one-time allocation to purchase seat belts for our district. I want our children to be safe on the bus and feel that this item could be creatively addressed rather than given lip service only.

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 handled fairly and expeditiously, with minimal distraction? Response:

I think that the School Board has more work to do in this area. While they meet in closed session in order to preserve the confidentiality of our staff and students, it does not appear that these items are being handled appropriately. I cannot comment fully on both sides of the issue until I have the opportunity to serve on the School Board and attend closed session meetings. HOWEVER, from an outside parents' perspective, the fact that we have 2 lawsuits pending against the School Board (one involving a student and one involving a staff member) speaks volumes to the ability of School Board members to communicate effectively with members of our parent and teacher communities. **BOTTOM LINE:** We need to communicate better as a School Board and seek to better understand any legal, moral, and ethical issues before they become a problem or result in a lawsuit.

Thank you to the Orange County Voice for the opportunity to voice my opinions and for providing coverage on these important issues!

-Laura Nicholson

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

Personal Profile

Name: Debbie Piscitelli

Position Sought: *Orange County School Board*

Incumbent (y/n): Y

Education/Professional Background:

- Attended public schools K-12
- Doctor of Pharmacy, University of Illinois-Chicago 1989
- General Pharmacy Residency, Duke University Medical Center 1989-1990
- Cardiovascular Fellowship, University of Illinois-Chicago 1990-1992
- Pharmacist and Owner, Triangle Medical Writing, LLC.

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? Response:**

I am a parent of two boys attending C.W. Stanford Middle School and I have been a volunteer in our District since my children were in kindergarten. My mother taught for 26 years and during my pharmacy fellowship I had teaching responsibilities.

I have greatly appreciated the opportunity to serve the community as a board member and I have enjoyed working with the talented and committed people in our District. The district is moving in the right direction and I would like to continue to serve. I believe I have had a positive impact as a board member. As a research pharmacist, my science training allows me to ask questions, look at issues from all sides, look at issues objectively, prepare well for meetings, request data, analyze data, and summarize data. In addition, years of medical writing have allowed me to sharpen my ability to articulate my position and communicate my ideas.

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

In my view, the primary responsibilities of the School Board are to create the vision, set the tone, and provide the leadership for the District. Creating policies and adopting the budget are important components of the School Board's responsibilities. Board members should also be role models to the teachers, students, and staff. The District is currently going through District Accreditation so the vision and mission statements along with the strategic plan have all been newly adopted this year. I support these statements and goals.

Vision Statement: "Orange County Schools prepares students to be responsible citizens in a diverse world by promoting academic and individual success."

Strategic Plan:

- Orange County Schools will provide excellent instruction to prepare students for global competitiveness.
- Orange County Schools will recruit and support highly qualified educators who work collaboratively to enhance student achievement.
- Orange County Schools will provide opportunities for involvement of the community in improving the health, safety, and well-being of our students and their families.
- Orange County School district leaders will promote a culture that embraces constructive change and focuses on continuous improvement.
- Orange County Schools will be supported by effective and efficient operations.

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? Response

Three quality programs that directly affect student achievement are the Pre-Kindergarten program, the Whole-to-Part Literacy program plus the additional literacy support at the high schools, and the UNC-G iSchool. The District has a multitude of programs that when added together create a solid educational foundation from which each student's needs can be met in order for he/she to advance through the system and graduate prepared for his/her future and be competitive with students across our State, Nation, and World.

Support for in-school suspended students and short-term, out-of-school suspended students need improvement. In order to ensure every student graduates high school, students cannot miss a multitude of class time. Additionally, students need to arrive to class prepared and ready to learn. Orange County Schools should improve their support to students receiving in-school and short-term, out-of-school suspensions. Currently, students receiving long-term, out-of-school suspension are considered for attendance at Partnership Academy. The District is developing a plan where students who received a short-term (< 10 days), out-of-school suspension would have a location to serve out their term where the student would have academic support to continue with his/her studies. Especially with block scheduling, students cannot miss many days of school without falling behind and having a difficult time passing the class.

My priority in addressing this issue is two-fold: first, I support a location for short-term, out-of-school suspended students. Second, I believe that for both in-school and out-of-school suspended students, the District should have a special Professional Learning Community (PLC) which would include the principal, a core teacher, the nurse, the social worker, the counselor, the safety resource officer and perhaps others. This PLC would work with the student to identify issues and create a plan for support.

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

Prioritized spending should focus on the educational foundation as it evolves from pre-K through 12th grade. Spending should be aligned with the District's strategic plan. In all likelihood funding will be cut. I would cut Board travel. It probably won't be enough to address the shortfall but the Board should find more cost efficient ways to obtain its professional development hours.

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? Response:

The amount of parental involvement allowed or encouraged with teachers and coaches is less than enough. Although we have pockets of wonderful parent-teacher/coach working relationships, I believe it would benefit our students to increase these numbers. With revenue continuing to decrease, parental and community involvement become more crucial. A couple of examples of where it is working well include 1) parents have helped to

clean up and maintain the baseball field and dugouts and 2) parents have donated medical items and participated as guest speakers for a medical unit.

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? Response:

The legislature has passed the 2009 Healthy Youth Act, House Bill 88 which becomes effective at the start of the 2010-2011 school year. I have concerns regarding this piece of legislation. I am the board representative for our Student Health Advisory Committee (SHAC) and as such my focus at this point is to make sure parents who want to be on the committee to choose the instructional materials have that opportunity. Also, I want to make sure it is communicated to parents that not only will they have the opportunity to review all materials that will be used in the program, but parents may request to have their children opt-out of the program. I want to ensure the board adopts a policy to address this Healthy Youth Act.

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

We have bullying in OCS. Students are keen enough to know how and when to bully without teachers/administrators being aware. Unfortunately, I believe we have adults in the District that exhibit bullying behavior to students and other adults. With the current legislation that allows victims of bullying to go straight to law enforcement, the District is strengthening their commitment to their bullying policy (Policy 7230). An example of this commitment occurred in at least one of our middle schools where Officer Comar addressed each grade level speaking directly to victims or potential victims about their rights. Additionally, the recent news stories regarding students who were bullied were discussed.

Board members can set the tone that bullying will not be tolerated and the Superintendent can portray this tone to principals. Collecting data and holding administrators accountable can decrease and stop bullying.

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?** Response: 30 minutes
- ii. Middle School Student?** Response: 35 minutes
- iii. High School Student?** Response: 40 minutes

Students should be on the bus for the least amount of time as possible. Unfortunately our District is approximately 300 sq miles in area and it is difficult to have short bus routes when for safety reasons many of the stops are at student's driveways and not coordinated bus stops. That being said, I still believe every effort must be made to decrease the time students spend riding the bus to and from school. Bus route software programs and bus driver input aid in creating efficient routes.

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

I am open to discussing installing seatbelts on school buses. Intuitively, seatbelts on school buses may improve safety and behavior. I would like more information (i.e., ability to enforce usage, increased time of bus rides waiting for each rider to buckle in, cost, number of injuries on buses per year that would have been prevented with seatbelts, etc.). I have not been in the position to make this decision, thus I have not done the research. At this point our District can ensure student safety on buses by 1) hiring and training quality bus drivers, 2) maintaining well-running buses, and 3) being aware of weather conditions and not putting buses on roads during dangerous weather.

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? Response:

The current code of conduct is adequate. Some rules and consequences for breaking those rules are clear and fair for all grade levels. Unfortunately in my opinion, some consequences do not have enough common sense for the elementary students.

The Board's role in assuring that legal/ethical issues involving faculty, staff, or board members are handled fairly and expeditiously, with minimal distraction is to work as a unified group: hear information at the same time, advise as a single unit, and keep clear records on each issue. It is advantageous to have consistency on the board: members with institutional knowledge so lessons learned from one situation can be applied to new ones.

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

Personal Profile

Name: Brenda Stephens

Position Sought: *Orange County School Board*

Incumbent (y/n): N

Education/Professional Background:

- **Bachelors degree in Sociology ~ Minor in Black Studies**
- **Master in Library and Information Science.**
- **Retired Director of Libraries for Caswell, Orange and Person**
- **Army Veteran ~ Fort Bragg was my permanent duty station.**
- **Filled in for teachers in the classroom at Cameron Park School during college years.**

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? Response:**

Serving as a school board member requires knowledge and commitment. Through my experience as a previous Board member, I believe that I have the knowledge to work effectively and colloratively on the board.

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

The role of a school board member is to establish policy for the school district and approve a budget and hire a qualified superintendent.

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?** Response

Efforts that are being made to close the Education Gap are successful. Drop Out prevention efforts are working well, there are efforts underway to promote Science with our robotics club. The face of FFA has changed significantly throughout the years, and that's a positive for our school district and it is making a difference in the lives of our children.

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

It is role of the administrative staff to make budgetary recommendations to the school board. The customarily act on the recommendations coming from the superintendent and staff. We have drastically cut, and I can't imagine where the district could possibly cut any further.

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?** Response:

There is never too much Parental Involvement. Parental Involvement is crucial in the educational process according to a Portland Based study. The study indicates that parents taking part in school functions, helping with homework and modeling desired behaviors heightens student achievement.

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?** Response:

I support sex education curriculum that provides factual information for students. I also support the development of curriculum that is geared appropriately to age level of students.

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

Response:

Bullying exists in all schools. It is incumbent upon the leadership to implement and enforce strategies which address ways to help reduce bullying.

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? Response: I believe 30 minutes would be reasonable for all elementary and 45 minutes for middle and high; however I know that this is not a reality for many students.

b. Should new school buses have seat belts? Why/why not? Response: Seat belts are a good idea, but are cost prohibitive.

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? Response:

Orange County schools have a Student Code of conduct. Many of the principles are guided by the North Carolina General Statutes and violators are subject to disciplinary actions by local officials.

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

Personal Profile

Name: Charles (Greg) Williams

Position Sought: *Orange County School Board*

Incumbent (y/n): N

Education/Professional Background: *UNC Chapel Hill – Computer Programming, Old Dominion University – Electronics Engineering, Naval War College – Joint Professional Military Education.*

- *Professional: CEO/President - SERT Systems, Inc, and Commanding Officer US Navy - NCTAMSLANT Detachment Raleigh, NC.*

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?**

As the CEO of a corporation, I have had experience with Budgets and Financial responsibility which would be of use when working with the county's school budget. From my military training, leadership and commitment are core values that are used and expected from the officer community. I am committed to ensuring that each student receives the quality education that they deserve. Additionally, my training as a certified Naval Instructor and the years that I have spent training our young sailors will be of value in the continued growth of Orange County Schools by ensuring that the curriculum and resources are up to date and used effectively.

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

Our primary responsibility is to ensure that each student receives a quality education in a safe environment with the tools needed to achieve that goal.

Goal 1: A quality education through continued Professional Development for our faculty, updated curriculums, creative teaching/instructional techniques, and the retention of our quality teaching staff.

Goal 2: Effective use and spending of the county's school budget.

Goal 3: Ensuring that the School Board has clear and open communication between the faculty, parents, and community.

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?

I think that both the Math and Science, along with the Media/Technology Programs are having a positive impact on our students, but that they have to be constantly updated to ensure that our schools technology and curriculum are on the cutting edge of where the rest of the world is. I want to see more done to improve the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) Program and greater emphasis on our Exceptional Children (EC) Programs – all of our students deserve a quality education and it is my tasking as a School Board member to ensure that is happening on my watch.

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

We would have to ensure that any cuts to programs would not negatively affect the quality of education for our students. The priority would be to not negatively affect that quality of instruction. We would have to be creative and look at what can affectively be cut back while still maintaining that high level of instruction – I don't think that there is one key area that can be cut. We have to weigh all choices and make the difficult decision of where to cut back.

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 don't think that we can ever say that parental involvement is about right or more than enough – the family has to be involved and the faculty and School Board have to listen. I think the more a family is involved in a child's education and school life,

the more affective that education can be. The feedback from parents and faculty help to sharpen the level of instruction and its effectiveness.

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?

I think that it is important to have age-appropriate sex education to inform our students of what happens if they have sex and how it can affect them at such a young age. I do agree with the addition of abstinence only programs in the hope that it will lower the number of teen pregnancies. Ultimately, the family has to be onboard and supportive of these programs – the continued education in this area needs to be strengthened and promoted by the parents.

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

I do not know of specific cases of bullying in Orange County Schools, but any school will have some form of bullying in varying stages and intensity. The key is to make the faculty aware of the signs and what to look for, to ensure that students know that they can come forward with a complaint and not feel threatened, and to ensure that parents are involved and supportive of the program to eliminate bullying. A structured form of punishment has to be utilized also – just sending the student home or suspending them is not always the answer. Keep them in school and learning through an “in school” suspension program, that way we can hopefully address the issue, correct it, and still offer that student an education; not giving them an opportunity to turn away from school and possibly drop out.

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?** ~ 30 minutes max
- ii. Middle School Student?** ~ 30 – 45 minutes max
- iii. High School Student?** ~ 1 hour max

Providing schools actually in some of these rural areas, and not just in the city limits, would improve this situation and cut down on some of the routes.

b. Should new school buses have seat belts? Why/why not? I think that it is a good idea. Any additional form of safety that can aid in the well being and security of our children on the buses is a plus. We need to make sure that we are doing everything to ensure their safety when traveling to school.

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 current Code of Conduct is very concise and detailed and explains what is and is not tolerated within the school system. It also clearly states the response by the school system if the code is violated. I think that it is working, but that it can be improved on. The code has to be adhered to at all times and infractions have to be handled expeditiously and fairly. The faculty has to be aware of what to do in the event the code is broken, students have to realize that infractions will be dealt with swiftly and fairly every time, and parents have to be involved and aware of their children's actions at school. The Board, Faculty, and Staff have to have all of the details of any infraction and make educated, fair decisions based on those facts. We have to remain neutral and not take sides that will cloud the outcome. The ultimate goal is to stand behind the Code of Conduct and provide a safe and positive environment in each of our schools.