

Ossining Teachers Association

School Board Candidate Questionnaire

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Date: May 15, 2010

Please type (in a different font) your responses to the following questions. Feel free to exceed the space provided. You may email your completed questionnaire as a word document or a pdf file. Your responses will be made available to members of Ossining Teachers Association.

- If elected/re-elected, what would you consider a priority in the upcoming year and how would you address it?

The budget is the top concern for me. We are unfairly, overburdening the legal resident taxpayers. We are not seeing a return on our investment with our graduation rates so low and there are those that advocate for a 5 year graduation plan. First, in regards to the 5 year graduation plan, that is lowering the bar. I don't know too many instructors who would lower their standards. As a mother, this is not a standard I would advocate for my children, as an instructor I know if you lower the bar the students will "step on it" and take even longer than 5 years if the bar is raised, students will be motivated to achieve the goal set and thirdly as an attorney the cost for educating a child is \$25,000 per year that cost can escalate quickly. It sets a terrible precedent especially when they enter the workforce. It also places them even further behind their global counterparts.

Regarding the budget, I think this district is too top heavy, we have many administrators who are earning too much money for our relatively small district. There are areas that can be cut that do not directly affect the student. Including many of the perks afforded the administration. I have often used the saying, "Too many chiefs and not enough Ossining Indian!"

- There are natural budgetary constraints when devising programs for schools (curriculum, instruction, class size, etc). What do you feel is the school board's responsibility to both the students of the district and to the taxpayers? How do you balance these resources and needs so that Ossining's students can be provided with the 21st century skills necessary to be successful?

The Board owes the taxpayers a fiduciary responsibility. They are entrusted with spending some else's money. That is a responsibility that should not be taken lightly. There are many areas of the budget that do not directly affect students. Those are the items that should be cut in order to make our budget fairly reflect the community our schools are serving. The community has to realize that good schools effect everyone not just parents with school age children. Good school systems sell homes allowing homeowners to get the best price for their home. So all benefit from having a highly rated and desired school system. While School Boards/Administrators must realize the tradeoffs necessary to accomplish this while still maintaining the support of the community. Those on fixed incomes, especially need to be considered. Grandparents, and extended family should play a role in a child's education, if they cannot afford to stay here no one benefits. It is a lose-lose situation.

The February 2009 Survey of Districtwide Staff provided to the Facilities Advisory Committee contains some of the requirements necessary to prepare students for the 21st century. Most of the staff surveyed indicated they require some basic tools to educate our children. Smart

boards seemed to be one of the most frequently requested items. With an over 102 million dollar budget it would seem that would be an easy item to provide. Along with technology more widely available to students and faculty alike. Also there are basic needs that must be met in order to provide an atmosphere conducive to learning and providing students with a well-rounded education. Many sited bathrooms that are not clean and do not work along with more working copier machines. Again, all basic items that with an over 102 million dollar budget should be easily accomplished. Others requested sinks in the classroom with better heating/ventilation systems. Capital improvements that once again seem to be easily accomplished with an over 102 million dollar budget. Many mentioned space constraints, I believe this issue to be a direct result of the Ossining Plan that could be rectified if the administration would consider alternatives to the plan which is clearly not working on many levels. These are all signs that our money is not being well spent and not going to the places it should to make our students and teachers successful.

- Why do you believe that the achievement gap exists and what do you feel should be done to decrease/eliminate it?

I believe the achievement gap exists predominately because of a lack of parental involvement in the schools. Almost 70% of a student's time is spent outside of the classroom. Early parental intervention is the key to raising a child that values and seeks out education. That child understands education is fundamental and leads to a successful career and ultimately life. Parents can simply tell their children how much they themselves value education. If there is a perceived language barrier, then parents must take the initiative to learn and speak the language of their new country and encourage their children to do the same. This can be done, while still maintaining their culture, as has been done by the many immigrants who have gone through our school system and have become productive members of society and serve as role models to the younger generations. Parents can show them by following that up by taking classes if necessary and/or joining the PTA or other school based group. Parents need to show a genuine concern for their children's progress and show an interest in reading. Simply attending parental conferences is a place to start. These are very basic and simple steps that can be taken but go a long way to decreasing the achievement gap.

As instructors we also play a pivotal role in bridging the gap. Studies have shown that the most effective teachers produce much more in terms of learning gains as compared to the least effective teachers. Empowering students whenever we get the opportunity and not just in the classroom. Students need to know they "can do it." Whether we see students on a sports field or in the grocery store there is always an opportunity to educate and to emphasize its importance. We need to enlist all areas of the community to emphasize the importance of education. This message should resonate in our religious organizations as well as our local government. Education is the key!

- As a school board member, what would you do to attract and keep the most qualified faculty and staff for the Ossining Schools?

To me teaching is a profession, not just a job. Having said that a professional environment is paramount. Respect for all our teachers needs to be fostered throughout the school community along with the community at large. New teachers must be enrolled in a mentoring program. All teachers regardless of tenured status, should be encouraged to have input in decisions that affect them and their classroom. Administrators, both in the teacher's respective

schools along with Central administration should have an "open-door" policy where teachers can discuss any problems or concerns they have without fear of retribution. Genuine attentiveness to the teachers concerns and implementing their suggestions where practicable will build a feeling of "team" so necessary to being a great teacher. No one can do it alone! This can only be done with a Board of Education that supports its instructors and by an administration that plays a leadership role. Although financial appreciation of teaching ability may not always be feasible, there are other ways to show appreciation for instructors. Students and parents should be encouraged to write a letter or note if they feel a teacher is deserving of such recognition. Luncheons and other festivities can go a long way to showing how thankful the community is for the job you do. This can also extend to the Village and Town levels. They too, should recognize our teachers at their Village/Town meetings. As I have said before the school district should not operate in a vacuum. All levels of the community should do their part to support and aid our teachers on their mission. On a personal note, I have saved many notes from my students, it helps to re-read these precious writings, especially on days when you feel you have not achieved everything you have hoped for.

- What else (specific ideas, characteristics, etc.) should the Ossining voters know about you that would make you the best person for this position on the school board?

I am a third generation Ossining resident and a product of our school system and a Proud Ossining Indian as was my mother. I have direct knowledge of our school system beginning my school career in Roosevelt School my neighborhood K-5 elementary school at a time when there was much violence and inequities in our all of our schools, especially the high school where violence was commonplace based along racial lines. Redistricting was then implemented when each of our four elementary schools were transformed into better, sociological, ethnical and better racially balanced K-5 schools. I was then bused to Brookside School. A change many in the community did not initially support. Yet, when I graduated from Ossining High School it was one of the top 10 high schools in the State of New York, while still remaining one of the most racially and ethnically diverse schools. An honor I feel was in part due to the redistricting plan implemented in the mid-1970's. The redistricting program transformed our schools and made them models for other districts. Some of our current teachers were a product of those redistricting plan as well.

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- The Ossining Plan implemented in 1981 has not done the same. It has become very costly, and causes our children to be moved around too frequently. Children need stability and continuity to learn effectively, lack of these factors causes a decrease in academic achievement. A situation that, unfortunately, is prevalent in our current school system today. The Ossining Plan has also caused what is perceived to be an overcrowding problem in our schools. We have had many more students in our schools prior to the implementation of the Ossining Plan, our schools were also physically smaller buildings and yet, we were able to successful education our students in classes that, in some cases were, much smaller than the collaboratives of today. My classes averaged approximately 24 students per class. Even accounting for the full-day kindergarten and pre-k of today, (back then kindergarten was half-day) we still had over 500 more students in the schools. We need to implement a plan with proven results. The misplaced allegiance for the Ossining Plan is due in part from the fact that parents believe if we eliminate the Ossining Plan we will return to segregated, neighborhood schools. This is not the case. Yet, the administration refuses to even investigate the cost savings and benefits of this plan and allows and even fosters such misconceptions. A change is needed to accomplish our goals and return Ossining Schools to place of distinction it once held. Very successful districts with very high

graduation rates use a more traditional K-5 elementary school plan. It takes a strong leadership to admit they were wrong and to fairly investigate solutions and implement them.

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- I know the importance of education and the vital role a teacher plays. My mother, a proud, Ossining Indian and OHS graduate, worked as a Para-professional at Brookside School. She was genuinely moved by the teachers she worked with and the students she met. She imparted that love of education and service to me. I was fortunate to do my student teaching at Ossining High School and obtain my NYS Certification.

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- I earned a B.S. in Criminal Justice and Business Administration, I earned my M.B.A. with specialization marketing and my J.D. Degree. Subsequently I was admitted to the New York State Bar and Federal Court. I began my career as a teacher in the then Westchester Business Institute, I also worked as a textbook reviewer. I worked for Rockland Boces and in Spring Valley High School as well as Ramapo High School as an instructor. These districts were very diverse. I then worked as an attorney handling all aspects of trial work in insurance defense as well as real estate.

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- I think a strong, structured family life is extremely important element necessary to have successful children. My husband is a retired US Veteran who also enjoys reading and knows the importance of education. Currently he is a sergeant in the NYPD. Again, understanding the importance of education and family, I left my attorney position when my first son, Gregory, was born. I was then blessed with a second son, Frank. Both sons are now students in the Ossining School System. We cherish the time we spend with them and feel we are imparting our love of education to them. Both are so excited to go to school and are very pleased with their teachers. With the help of great teachers, we sincerely hope this "excitement" regarding learning will stay with them throughout their school careers and beyond.

- Do you support the proposed 2010-2011 Ossining School Budget? Yes ___ No X