

2014 Oyster River Teachers' Guild

Durham, NH 03824

The following questionnaire was sent to all candidates for School Board. Candidates were asked to respond to a number of questions pertaining to education in the Oyster River School District. This voter's guide is a compilation of their responses. It is not intended to be an endorsement of any one candidate, but rather a source of information to assist district residents in making an informed choice when voting on Tuesday March 11th.

- ❖ All answers are printed as received from the candidates.
- ❖ Official school district ballot voting will occur at town polling locations:

Town of Durham	Oyster River High School	7:00 am to 7:00 pm
Town of Lee	Lee Safety Complex	7:00 am to 7:00 pm
Town of Madbury	Madbury Town Hall	11:00 am to 7:00 pm

Two at-large positions (vote for 2)

1. Briefly tell us about yourself and your background? If elected, what experience would you bring to school board?

Denise Day	Sarah Farwell	Michael Williams
<p>I have lived in Durham with my husband and son since 1995. My son attended Oyster River schools from kindergarten through his graduation. I have a Master of Education in Counselor Education from Rivier University and a Bachelor of Arts from University of New Hampshire. I am a Family Advocate Supervisor for Strafford County Head Start. Prior to coming to Head Start in 2001, I worked for 7 years as a middle school counselor.</p> <p>I have attended the Oyster River School Board meetings on a regular basis for the past three years. As such, I have a familiarity with the current issues the board is facing. I also have knowledge of the district dating back to when my son first started kindergarten in 1996. I was active in the schools throughout my son's education and still attend the high school PTO meetings on a regular basis.</p>	<p>I have lived in Lee for fourteen years with my husband Tobin and our 3 kids: Silas (5th gr), Maggie (3rd gr) and Eliza (K). I first came to the area as a UNH student and graduated with a BA in Psychology in 1991. In 1993 I earned my M.ED in Elementary Education (K-8) from Boston College and taught for a total of 10 years in Brookline, MA, Anchorage, AK and Exeter Cooperative District before becoming a "stay at home mom". We moved into the district because we wanted great schools for our kids, were thrilled by it's proximity to the University and we loved Lee's rural/agricultural feel. I have served on the Mast Way PTO Board for the past 3 years in addition to serving on hiring committees for two Mast Way Principals and the current Mast Way Secretary. I participated in the "future search" process, and served on the Elementary Enrollment Committee. I actively follow the school board which allows me to stay current with district issues.</p>	<p>My wife and our three children love living in Durham. Our kids are 5 years, 3 years, and 4 months old. We have a son in kindergarten at Moharimet and a daughter in PEP. I have a M.S. in mechanical engineering, and have been working on medical device design and manufacturing my entire career. Much of that time I have spent leading projects and working to make sure that team members in different jobs and locations are working together productively towards the same goals. A big part of my job now is planning new projects so we can meet future needs at reasonable cost. This means getting agreement from everybody affected about the priorities, people, and money involved in getting the job done. It is this experience systematically identifying priorities, pulling together detailed plans, and making informed decisions that I would bring to the school board.</p>

2. Explain why you are running for a school board position? What do you consider to be the most important issues facing our students, schools and the district?

Denise Day	Sarah Farwell	Michael Williams
<p>I began taking an interest in the school board 3 years ago. Since that time, there has been a significant turnover at both the administrative and school board level. We have great administrators and school board members, including some who are relatively new to the district. I believe that my knowledge and experience in the district for the past two decades would complement the skills of those already on the board.</p> <p>Oyster River has a tradition of providing a top-notch education for our children. We need to continue to support creativity and excellence in our schools, while also being mindful to find the most economical ways to do so. Initiatives like energy cost savings allows us to be good stewards of tax payer dollars without compromising our schools.</p> <p>One of the biggest challenges facing the district is predicting enrollment. For the past few years we have heard that enrollment is decreasing, but recently we saw a surprising increase. The Long Range Planning Committee still predicts a decline over time, but I believe the board needs to make decisions that allow for a significant cushion, should those predictions prove wrong.</p>	<p>I am running for School Board because I believe in excellent public education. I want to make sure Oyster River Schools are strong so that my kids and all OR students can feel well prepared for their lives in the 21st century. With the increased demand for accountability, there is more formal testing/assessment in schools these days. Our schools are challenged with making sure that our kids perform well on those tests while maintaining the academic richness and rigor that has always been present and expected in the Oyster River Schools.</p> <p>In addition to academic rigor, our schools and communities must work together to raise resilient kids that can handle the fast paced, complex society that we live in. We want the best for our students and that can be achieved through thoughtful decision making and the setting of clear priorities. This will allow us to have excellent schools that our communities can afford.</p>	<p>I am running for school board because I think it is important to have a voice representing elementary families on the board (by July none of the existing board members will have elementary aged children), and because there is opportunity to improve the way we make decisions. The process we use to make decisions about important issues should be consistent, transparent, and thoughtful. I believe public education is the most important civic institution for our long term success as a community.</p> <p>The most important issues our schools face are implementation of common core standards and assessments, improving education in the face of stable or falling enrollment, and addressing maintenance and investment needs in our school facilities within a reasonable budget. I would also like to see the district take a comprehensive look at school safety.</p>

3. What is your position on contracts that have been negotiated in good faith by the school board and the various unions in the district? Please explain your answer.

Denise Day	Sarah Farwell	Michael Williams
<p>Those who have negotiated the contracts deserve a lot of credit. They have reached agreements that allow for growth while also staying within budgetary constraints. It is not an easy thing to reach agreements that can be supported by all sides, and I believe they have done so.</p>	<p>I am very aware that it takes a lot of time and effort to negotiate contracts and I would honor that work by supporting any such contract.</p>	<p>I was impressed with both the school board and Teachers Guild for presenting the voters with a contract that meets the needs of teachers, the board, and the district, and I will vote for this contract. As long as the board, administration, and unions can work together to adapt to the changing needs of our students, I would support contracts negotiated in good faith.</p>

4. What do you perceive as the strengths of the Oyster River Cooperative School District?

Denise Day	Sarah Farwell	Michael Williams
<p>We have amazing teachers in our district. We have historically sought to hire the best teachers to fill vacancies and we have been fortunate to retain so many of them. We also have a talented leadership team. Our other staff members, from those working in our cafeterias, to the bus drivers, paraprofessionals and custodial staff, often don't get enough credit for the important role they play in our system. We also are fortunate to have engaged parents and a greater community that supports education.</p>	<p>We have a community that places value on education. Our parents show that through their involvement, our administration and staff show that through their incredible dedication and professionalism, our students show it through their participation and the community at large shows it through its vote. My experience is that our teachers and staff value our children as individuals and honor the characteristics that make them unique. With that foundation, everything is possible.</p>	<p>We are fortunate to be a school district with many strengths. Commitment to high quality education by teachers, students, and parents are the greatest strengths of our district. It is impossible to overstate the value of a culture that supports and values education, and we have that in Oyster River. Another key strength of the district is the effort we make to truly reach every student – this is evident from when students step on the bus right in front of their homes as kindergartners to the variety of academic and extracurricular offerings at ORMS and ORHS.</p>

5. What areas in the Oyster River Cooperative School District do you perceive as in need of improvement?

Denise Day	Sarah Farwell	Michael Williams
<p>There is always room for improvement. In particular, I see a need for capital improvements, especially to our middle school. However, we have to be careful about making changes without carefully considering all the ramifications. People who are passionate about a cause can be persuasive, but it's important that we take the time to examine the issue from every perspective. How will the proposed change impact students, teachers, and our facilities, not just today, but 5 or 10 years down the road?</p>	<p>District data suggests that we may need to do more in the area of math and we know that strong math/science skills will be even more important to our students in the future. As a middle school math teacher for 10 years I understand the need for strong math and science. When the administration feels our facilities can support it, I will support full day K. I believe that our students may benefit from expanding our foreign language program. Along with these possible areas of improvement, it is fiscally prudent for us to fully support every initiative that we start. For example, as technology becomes more prevalent in our schools, let's make sure we provide the necessary support to maintain that technology so that we realize its full benefit.</p>	<p>The most significant challenges we face in the next few years are implementation of common core standards and related assessment tools, responding to changing demographics in the district, and a comprehensive capital improvement plan. I am not an educational expert, but I will work to ensure that the process of adopting and rolling out new standards and tools is transparent and inclusive of teachers, parents, and students. Our long range planning process needs to be tied together with addressing our capital needs across the district, so that we can prioritize how we address the \$3 million in deferred maintenance we already have in addition to providing the right facilities.</p>

6. As a school board member, how would you support the district's mission of working together to engage every learner?

Denise Day	Sarah Farwell	Michael Williams
<p>The school board has an obligation to make decisions that support the needs of all students. If elected, I would consider how decisions being made affect students with differing interests and differing ability levels. It is also important to consider how decisions contribute to school climate. I believe the board has an important role in setting the tone in this respect.</p>	<p>I think there are a lot of things that allow a district to meet the needs of different learners. To begin with, one needs to acknowledge that each child's experience is unique and that the district's job is to provide each individual with the opportunities to get them to their own next best place. For some students, that will involve using a variety of teaching styles to get content across. Strong Professional Development is crucial for teachers to keep their teaching fresh, energized and current. For some students it will be a broader variety of classes, whether made available in ORCSD classrooms, on-line, at the University or some other venue. For still others it will require making sure that our learners continue to get the additional supports and small class sizes that they need to be successful and connected.</p>	<p>I will focus on the <u>working together</u> part of the slogan. I firmly believe that every major decision must be made after a clear process of determining our needs and getting input and thoughtful analysis from all groups that will be affected. I will champion working together for good decision making processes.</p>

7. Our district has seen a number of talented and valuable employees leave the district in the last few years. What will you do to attract and retain exceptional talent to the Oyster River District?

Denise Day	Sarah Farwell	Michael Williams
<p>Oyster River has traditionally had a reputation of being very supportive of educators, and I believe that is true. I think the recently negotiated teacher contract is an example of this. Oyster River has also traditionally supported teacher creativity in the classroom. With the implementation of the Common Core, I think a real challenge will be to continue to allow teachers the freedom to be creative and use their strengths.</p>	<p>Quality educators are attracted to and stay in districts that value them as professionals. This means once the district has agreed that they are aligned with our philosophy of education, we must trust them and listen to them. I do not mean that we follow them blindly but rather we listen, ask questions, give feedback, discuss and then trust they are going to do what is in the best interests of our students and our community. Providing a stable environment in which to work is attractive. Providing mentors to new teachers is key. Lastly the board must work with the leadership team to prioritize and stay focused.</p>	<p>I want to ensure than employees feel heard in the district, that teachers and staff are included along with students, parents and the community in providing input for planning and decision-making. We have an incredibly committed team of teachers, staff, and administrators. It is important that they all know that the school board and community support and respect our district’s employees at all levels. I believe we can increase the sense of community and ownership among all Oyster River employees that keeps teachers, staff, and administrators wanting to come to and stay in the Oyster River schools by including all employee groups in figuring out where we need to focus our energy.</p>

8. What will you do to ensure the opinions of the entire community are heard and listened to?

Denise Day	Sarah Farwell	Michael Williams
<p>I believe that the more information the board has about an issue, the better decision the board will ultimately make. I would like the board to continue to hold forums on various topics throughout the community. I would also like to revisit the policy regarding staff members speaking during the Public Comment portion of the board meeting. At a meeting earlier this year, staff members were instructed not to speak. However, in the past, whenever a teacher or other staff member spoke during Public Comments, it appeared to me that those comments were respectful and contributed</p>	<p>When making PTO decisions, we used forums, meetings, on-line surveys, and email requests to solicit feedback from Mast Way parents, students and staff. I think many of the same tools can, and in some cases already are, used at the School Board level. The forums that the District has provide over the past few years have been very valuable and I hope that they will continue. I will make myself available to anyone in the community who wishes to speak with me and I will continue to maintain a presence in the schools and the community at large.</p>	<p>Developing clear priorities and decision-making processes and following them should give everybody involved, including residents and taxpayers in the district. Making decisions considering input from everybody affected certainly includes parents, neighbors, and taxpayers.</p> <p>I also support a practice that ensures the community has a chance to comment on board actions whenever a proposal is introduced or significantly changed. The board should not take action in one meeting on a new proposal that the public has not had a chance to</p>

<p>information that was helpful to the board in their decision making process.</p>		<p>consider and comment on. If a proposal is introduced or modified, it should not be finalized until a later meeting. We already do this with the 1st read / 2nd read system over multiple meetings for policy changes. This should be extended to other board actions.</p>
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9. What steps are you prepared to take to encourage transparency by the Oyster River school board?

Denise Day	Sarah Farwell	Michael Williams
<p>Transparency is very important and I will take great care to abide by the laws governing school board discussions.</p>	<p>It is important that there be good communication between the schools and the community at large. I will see that I am knowledgeable and current with all RTK laws. I will vote for policies that promote transparency and I will keep board conversations at the board table.</p>	<p>I would like to see more cases where a detailed proposal is presented to the community <i>before</i> the meeting where the board will be acting on it. In 2013, the discussions around high school tuition agreements were a good example of how this should be done; the process of resolving elementary enrollment was not. I expect that the decisions the board makes should have thoughtful analysis before the board acts. This is where my engineering and project management experience will be useful.</p> <p>The board should not make major decisions without a detailed proposal being available for public review and comment, for example being proposed at one meeting and voted on at the next.</p>

10. What do you see as the role of school board in our community? Will you adhere to guidelines set up by the New Hampshire School Boards Association that address such a role?

Denise Day	Sarah Farwell	Michael Williams
<p>The primary responsibilities of the board include setting policy and creating a district budget to be presented to the voters. It's important for school board members not to overstep their bounds. I believe remaining mindful of this at all times is key.</p>	<p>Oyster River is highly regarded because of our schools and should I be elected, I believe it is my job to make sure that the reputation is deserved and retained. I also believe that I need to be a visible advocate for public education because it is one of the community's most important assets. Promoting it publicly allows people to feel proud and invested in the district's continued development. I will absolutely adhere to guidelines set up by the NH School Board Association.</p>	<p>The school board's job is to represent the community to make sure we have the right people, priorities, and policies. The NHSBA guidelines are clear and I agree with them. It's the board's job to find and keep excellent administrators, and ensure that the environment in the district is right to find and retain excellent teachers and staff. The board represents the community in setting priorities and maintaining financial oversight. We have a thoughtful community that deserves a thoughtful and deliberate school board.</p>

11. What specifically will you do to ensure the school board meetings are run in an efficient and productive manner?

Denise Day	Sarah Farwell	Michael Williams
<p>I will do what I can to be prepared and to stay on topic during discussions. That being said, it is important to devote the time needed to discuss all aspects of an issue to arrive at the best decision for our district.</p>	<p>I will do my homework and arrive at the meetings having done my reading and research. I will follow Roberts Rules of Order while taking part in board meetings. I will communicate in a respectful and productive way, listening and learning from administrators, staff members and community members. When asked to make tough decisions, I will do so with the interests of all ORCSD students and community members in mind.</p>	<p>Part of the job of the school board is to thoroughly consider what a decision will mean to all affected. Sometimes this means that school board meetings need to be long to be productive. I will push for a clear set of priorities that should help make decision making clear and more efficient. As an engineer, I am used to providing and getting detailed plans and detailed analysis, and I would not hesitate to ask at a board meeting for a proposal to be developed or analyzed in greater detail before it is presented rather than spend a lot of time discussing different interpretations of the proposal.</p>