

Candidate Responses – Orange County School Board

Sandy J. Harrington

Question 1: Position Seeking:

SH: School Board

Question 2: Have You Previously Held this Position?

SH: No

Question 3: Will you be attending the August 23, 2023, Orange County Candidate Showcase?

SH: Yes

Question 4: How will you foster relationships between businesses and the school community?

SH: When elected I will support implementation of Objective III: Stakeholder Engagement and Support in the 2023-2028 Orange County Public Schools (OCPS) Strategic Plan. This objective prioritizes further development of essential business and school community partnerships.

To foster these relationships, I recommend researching, implementing, or expanding Board member and Superintendent representation in civic organizations, such as:

- Orange County's Chamber of Commerce, Farm Bureau, local chapter NAACP.
- Economic Development Partners Group.
- Orange County Community Events.
- School community events within their own district.

I also encourage prioritizing and establishing a position dedicated to the implementation of the Stakeholder Engagement and Support objective, to fulfill these roles:

- Supporting current business partnerships, programs, internships.
- Developing new local and regional business partnerships, including a focus on advanced and sustainable agri-business.
 - Identifying innovative learning, career exploration and career development opportunities.
 - Organizing career-related educational field trips targeting middle school level students.
 - Working closely with all stakeholders researching ongoing funding sources towards securing space for expansion of OCPS Career Technical Education (CTE) OCPS is fortunate to partner with local businesses and organizations, such as Orange County's Chamber of Commerce, Farm Bureau, and local NAACP chapter. These business partnerships provide many benefits to the Orange County School System and its students.

I look forward to developing personal relationships within our business communities and supporting positive, innovative, and safe student-centered partnerships.

Question 5: Over the years, minority representation has decreased relative to administration and teaching staff. There is a growing concern among the African American community relative to the issue. What would be your proposal to help bridge the gap?

SH: There is currently a nationwide shortage of new teachers entering the workforce. This shortage is exacerbated as teachers continue to leave the workforce post COVID. Teachers are choosing to retire, stay home with family or change careers. The limited number of new teachers replacing those leaving is creating a critical mass shortage of educators, and this is expected to worsen. Nowhere else is the impact more evident than within minority demographics.

Historically, African Americans have been negatively impacted by a myriad of socio-economic and racial challenges. The resulting disparities between educational opportunities afforded Black Americans needs to be addressed.

First, I would review and ensure alignment between the Strategic Plan Objective IV: Recruitment and Retention, and the Virginia Department of Education's report Turning the Tide: Addressing the Educator Shortage in Virginia.

Other recommendations include: • Active partnership between the local chapter of the NAACP, Orange County Farm Bureau, and OCSS Community Partnership Liaison • Active partnership between Community College, OCSS CTE program, and Orange Farm Bureau • Identification and alignment of educational/instructional areas with local job growth opportunities • Explore partnerships with National Black Farmers Association an advocacy group for civil rights, financial resources, education, agricultural training, and rural economic development for black and other small farmers. • Explore partnerships and recruitment opportunities with Historically Black Colleges and Universities. • Identify and encourage African American community members to volunteer or apply for part-time jobs at OCPS. This can include reading to students, being a recess or lunch monitor, helping in a classroom. The value of seeing adults who "look like me", whether by race, gender, disability or other characteristic, is an important motivator for children.

Of course, hiring should always be focused on getting the right person for the job. The right person who provides the highest quality educational experience to all students. An educator who engages and excites our students. An educator capable of motivating our children to embrace education, become life-long learners and are representative of our community and student-population.

Question 6: Our youth are our future. Agricultural education and organizations such as FFA plug students into the pathways available to grow, supply, and create within the agricultural sector. How would you like to see agricultural education be best supported in Orange County Public Schools? Are you in favoring of continuing these programs; what changes, if any, would you like to see? What experience do you have working with said programs?

SH: As the daughter and granddaughter of cattle ranchers, and farmers, I understand the importance of developing and maintaining a strong agricultural base. First and foremost, it is essential to ensure the United States has the ability and capacity to feed our own citizens. In addition, it provides a level of national security by ensuring a continual and sustainable food source within our borders while minimizing our need for importing food.

From both a historical and economic perspective the importance of agriculture within Orange County cannot be overstated. The career opportunities aligned within the agricultural sector are far-ranging and varied. Therefore, school system partnerships with the Orange County Farm Bureau and other agricultural education organizations such as FFA and 4H are hugely

important, and need to be actively supported while options to expand ag-ed programs and partnerships are explored.

In my opinion, students need to understand what, why and how agriculture impacts our county, society, and world. The students in Orange County should be learning the importance of agriculture as soon as possible and provided opportunities for extended learning and exploration of career paths available within the agricultural sector. These types of lessons can and should be embedded throughout the K-12 educational process.

Some recommendations to explore include: • Research the Virginia Farm Bureaus “Agriculture in the Classroom” (AITC) program. A program designed to meaningfully connect our students to agriculture with lessons aligned to Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL). • Encourage and support student/classroom Vegetable Garden projects, Flower Gardens, 4H and FFA participation and projects o Grow food for classroom culinary projects • Partnerships with Virginia Farm Bureaus Young Farmers and Discussion Meet activities • Explore Farm-to-Table partnerships o Culinary program, Student Enterprise o Student lunch program – Homecooked Meals • Integrate math and science lessons/projects with agricultural related learning opportunities and classroom instruction.

My experience is based on the responsibilities involved in administration and oversight of Child Nutrition Programs within the K-12 Public Education System. I was also active in 4-H, FFA and High School Rodeo and understand the importance of these complimentary programs to a student’s academic achievement, and social growth. The responsibility of caring for an animal, the healthy competition, the sense-of-pride in one’s accomplishments can only enhance a student’s educational experience.

Question 7: Please further explain your interest in a position with our local School Board. What is your connection to Orange County Public Schools?

SH: In 2021, my Virginia roots called me home. I was born in Arlington, VA and raised by my grandparents in Falls Church and Broad Run until I was 10, when I moved to California with my mother. My first ten years with my grandparents were a strong influence. From them I learned the values of respect, kindness, hard work, diligence, integrity and strength of character. These are the values that propelled and sustained me throughout my career, and those that I intend to model when serving on the School Board.

The life-long lessons learned from my grandparents along with my years of business experience in Public Education are the foundation for my decision to run for the open seat on the Orange County School Board, District 5. Having worked in senior administrative positions for K-12 public school districts I am keenly aware of a School Board Member’s role. I know a district is strongest when a School Board works together with trust and respect to approve and monitor budget, set direction, policy and practices, and collaborates with the Superintendent to create a positive learning environment for students, teachers and parents.

Upon my return to Virginia, and after one visit to Lake of the Woods, I knew Orange County was where I would retire. I also knew I wanted to find a way to give back to my community, When I found out there was an upcoming school board election, it made perfect sense to use my existing skills, knowledge and abilities to benefit OCPS. The expertise I gained during my career in public education will be useful and is needed to support informed student-centered decisions.

I am the right candidate, at the right time and with the right experience for Orange County Public Schools.

Question 8: What is your stance on CTE education and internship opportunities in the community and how will you support these efforts?

SH: I strongly support the Career Tech Education program. I believe this type of program provides multiple pathways and opportunities for student success in the classroom and in life. When elected to the School Board I will advocate for continued research into community, regional, state, and private business partnerships to help move the much-needed expansion of the CTE program forward. I will support research into supplemental one-time and ongoing funding sources. I will work closely with the Superintendent and Board to support timely development and implementation of an actionable plan, as defined in the Strategic Plan, Objective III Stakeholder Engagement & Support, and elaborated in the first answer above.

Question 9: What do you consider to be the greatest needs of the Orange County Public Schools that the School Board can resolve? If elected, what would be your top priority?

SH: The priorities listed below fall within the duties and responsibilities of a School Board working as a cohesive team dedicated to putting students first. They reflect my observations and discussions with staff, parents, and community members. These are the actions I will diligently work to complete in my first tenure on the School Board.

Continual Improvement in Student Achievement: Work with the Superintendent to identify and prioritize methods to achieve the following outcomes. • Continued access to Career and Technical Education programs. • Provide competitive compensation to Increase teacher recruitment, and retention. • Increase student attendance and parent engagement • Maintain an apolitical decision-making approach to curriculum

Planning for Growth and Safety: Orange County is growing. Farmlands, pastures and fields will be developed. We must provide students and staff with safe and necessary facilities in which to learn and work. • Complete a population growth study to plan for and meet the need for school facilities and educational resources. • Complete a 5-year and a 10-year plan for High School facilities. • Perform a physical safety audit with implementation of necessary safety measures at all school facilities. • Implement the strategic plan actions for student physical, mental, social and emotional health and safety.

Maintain a Respectful Climate and Culture: The climate and culture of any organization is part and parcel to achieving excellence, and excellence starts at the top. • Encourage the Orange County School Board to become a “Virginia School Board Association Master Board.” • Include a non-voting Student Representative appointed from the High School on the school board to provide student perspective. • Incorporate Critical thinking, Creative thinking, Communication, Collaboration, and Citizenship (the Virginia Education Department "5C's") throughout the school district for students and staff.

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