

2017 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 14th.

- ❖ 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	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 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 learned a lot during my first term on the school board and I look forward to taking the knowledge and experience I have gained into my second term.</p>	<p>My family and I have lived in Oyster River for nearly 6 years, and we have two children at Moharimet and a rising preschooler. If elected, in the fall I will be the only board member with elementary or preschool children, and likely the only special needs parent on the board. I'm trained as an engineer, and I lead new design and quality improvement projects. With my technical background, I may bring a slightly different perspective to analysis and problem solving to the 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	Michael Williams
<p>It has been a privilege to work for the past three years with my fellow board members and the very dedicated and talented administrative team led by Dr. Morse. A lot has been accomplished and I look forward to continuing to work toward the betterment of our district.</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 of taxpayer dollars. This has not been an easy task, given the substantial increases in health insurance and retirement costs. It has taken a lot of work on the part of our leadership team to identify the most pressing needs, and also to come up with some creative solutions. Engaging the Confucius Institute to teach Mandarin Chinese in our schools is one example of a creative solution.</p> <p>A significant issue is the condition of our aging middle school. We need to continue to explore the best way to move forward to address this need.</p> <p>I am also concerned about the mental health and wellness of our students. The board has heard from faculty, parents and the students themselves about the pressure they feel to succeed. Factors such as social media and increased choices for both academics and extra curricular activities also play a role in this issue. The later start time is one response that will hopefully help our students, but more needs to be done.</p>	<p>There are few institutions that have the kind of impact on our community that the school district has. I want to be a part of maintaining and strengthening the quality of education in Oyster River. Looking ahead, our most important short term issues are making sure we are doing everything we can and should for student safety and mental health. We also need to be diligent about planning for our future building needs. And we need to be on guard against changes in Washington or Concord that could impair our ability to meet every student's needs.</p>

3. How do you feel about the current direction of the district? How will you build consensus and support in the community around the work of the school district?

Denise Day	Michael Williams
<p>I believe as a district we have accomplished a lot in the last three years and as such are moving in a positive direction. Examples of these accomplishments include the implementation of all-day kindergarten, the completion of the fields renovation project, the implementation of the new math curriculum, and the development of the transgender policy, which was the first in the state.</p> <p>Communication is key to building consensus. We saw that with the fields renovation project, which finally passed after many attempts over the years. It is important to listen to the ideas and concerns of all stakeholders, provide avenues for feedback, and to be transparent in the decision making process.</p>	<p>I appreciate the stability the district has developed the last three years with the Barrington tuition agreement, elementary enrollment balance, and (at least to an outsider) very good relationship between the SAU and the unions in the district. We have demonstrated an ability and interest in continuing to make gradual changes to improve education in areas like competency-based-learning and middle/high school schedules. There is some opportunity to improve how the district communicates about some of these significant issues. With highly visible questions like football and major investments like potential middle school construction, we need to do a better job of distilling very complex issues into summaries that can be distributed and talked about widely in our community.</p>

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

Denise Day	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>The mission of supporting every student is a key part of our success. This is demonstrated in the positive attitudes we see in students entering our schools every morning, in high graduation rates and test scores, and in high levels of extracurricular and community engagement.</p>

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

Denise Day	Michael Williams
As mentioned previously, the condition of our middle school is one area that definitely needs to be addressed.	<p>One concern we need to always be on guard against is complacency in the quality of education in Oyster River. We need to always be looking at what we are doing that is working well to enhance it, be open to trying new things, and consistently evaluate pilot programs.</p> <p>Communication with the non-school community is another area of opportunity for us - we generally have a school administration that is very willing to share information transparently and answer questions, but not much of that seems to reach households in the district that don't have students or staff in the household. This is not about spin, but about getting the right information out in the right ways.</p>

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

Denise Day	Michael Williams
I think it is very important to hire teachers who love children and are passionate about what they do. Providing the opportunity for professional development is also very important. When it comes to new initiatives or policies, the school board has an obligation to make decisions that support the needs of all students. Sometimes that is difficult to do when there is a smaller group that is advocating for a decision that may benefit a particular group, but may not benefit the greater school community. I believe it is important to listen carefully to all sides, and then to make the decision that will have the greatest positive outcome for our students. I think 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>We should continue to assess and expand the variety of middle and high school elective course offerings to give students maximum agency in their own educations.</p> <p>I have seen the level of effort and support we provide to our special needs students. Since it is not practical to be able to provide that level of services to every student, we need to make sure we are assessing and supporting student needs in a way that identifies areas where a student needs additional support, even if that student does not qualify by a legal definition of special education. Similarly, I would like to gain a better understanding how we support and challenge students who have interests and abilities beyond the classroom curriculum.</p>

7. Much focus is made on ensuring Oyster River graduates are prepared as they head to college. What can Oyster River schools do better to prepare those students who enter the workforce right out of high school?

Denise Day	Michael Williams
As part of next year's budget, the current board just approved a new position at the high school for an Extended Learning Opportunity instructor. This person will be responsible for creating opportunities for our students outside of the traditional classroom. I think creating internships and more "real world" learning for all of our students will provide them with more skills and a better understanding of different career paths. We also have to make sure that we are validating other career paths other than that of the four-year college degree.	We need to ensure that no post-high-school path is stigmatized, so the district does not bias students' choices in ways that are not right for each student. I am not an expert on preparation for entering the workforce, and would look to experts both inside and outside the district to guide our path.

8. What are the district's greatest capital needs right now? How do you think those needs should be addressed?

Denise Day	Michael Williams
As mentioned previously, the middle school is definitely our greatest capital need. These past few years we have been faced with unanticipated expenses for failing systems there. We need to decide if it makes more sense to renovate the current school, or build an entirely new middle school. I believe we are still in the beginning stages of determining the best route to take. Whatever we decide will involve a bond, so it's going to be very important to engage the greater community in the decision making process.	The district continues to make progress on deferred maintenance of our physical spaces, however the greatest capital need is clearly the middle school facility. I look forward to getting to know the program needs at the middle school better and understand how they have been considered in the different options available for improving our middle school environment. I would like to see the district take a more proactive position in both planning and communicating with the community about our long term capital needs.