

Okaloosa TIGER Committee Candidate Survey 2020

Candidate Name - Sherri Cox

Please type responses in the text boxes for each question. Limit responses to the text boxes. Save your survey to your computer, then attach and email to Carol Barlow cvb116@gmail.com.

1. In any capacity (teaching, administration, district level leadership) what sort of unique and inspired, "out of the box" idea did you implement that saw results?

While working in the Guidance Department at Destin Middle School, I was tasked with returning our at risk students to academic success, primarily 8th grade students, so they could be promoted on to high school. Most were not intellectually challenged, but rather suffering academic failures secondary to failing home environments, whether they be personal, family related, or simply a lack of established and effectively motivated study habits. My "out of the box" approach was to highlight the amazing achievements of certain figureheads from this time, who had overcome great adversity to get there. Putting personal beliefs aside, as I so often do in the interest of authenticity toward any far reaching outcome, I gave examples such as President Bill Clinton, Oprah Winfree, and Sam Walton, founder of Wal-Mart Corporation, all jaw-dropping examples to these at-risk kids, when comparing the many academic, personal and financial challenges shared by each of these exemplary superachievers, and how each of these examples had overcome those obstacles simply by making the decision to allow someone like myself to reach out and help them to reinvent themselves as the person they SEEK TO BECOME, rather than the version they felt like when they made that first step into my office.

2. What do you consider to be your weaknesses and strengths as a potential school board member?

My admitted weaknesses as a potential school board member will be my status as a civilian, if you will, having enjoyed a career which has not directly relied upon funding allocated by the State of Florida. Thus, my perspective, at first, will be somewhat limited as to which budget items are most vulnerable during budget shortfalls, etc. This is a piece upon which I am already building some knowledge and familiarity through the help of others who have served in this capacity.

My strengths are that I am a lifelong resident and a product of the Okaloosa County School District, Kenwood, Pryor, Choctaw, and I say this with all of the grandeur I feel is afforded a product of our fine schools and their outstanding educators. I remember each of mine by name, yes, every one, and every administrator, most of whom I remain friends with, across social media. I HAVE A VESTED INTEREST IN THESE EDUCATORS and the many friends and colleagues who nobly choose to follow in their footsteps. Additionally, I have many years experience managing huge budgets both to build new facilities and to restore aging facilities, all while preserving the jobs and quality of life of the number one asset to any organization...it's people.

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3. What is the one thing you learned in your career that you think will help you become the type of school board member our district needs?

The one thing I've learned in my career which will help me become the type of school board member our district needs is the absolute need to attract and maintain the staffing levels and morale necessary to achieve the goals set before us to maintain and improve our fine district. I am not the school board member who is going to unilaterally say that our #1 goal must be to restore confidence in our educators. Much the opposite, I believe that our educators are doing an outstanding job of teaching our students and that they have marched bravely through unthinkable wrath as many have judged all by the actions of a few. In a career which has been deeply saturated with politics, I have very well established relationships with legislators throughout our state, many of whom will be approached for funding our schools, and I will say that this does not happen at the helm of someone who possesses a scorched earth mentality when addressing highly publicized opportunities for correction. I firmly believe that our teachers and administrators have proven themselves many times over, and that our focus must now return to providing them with the environment and the tools they need to continue to being motivated to provide a positive learning environment for our students, and frankly one which will encourage new recruits to do the same.

4. The face of education is constantly changing. What is one recent trend that you think will have a major influence on school districts in the years to come?

The most immediately observable change in the face of education poised to influence our school districts for years to come is without a doubt, technology. This is such a passionate subject for me. As education evolves more toward distance and electronic learning, so lessens the overwhelming influence teachers might have upon our students when shaping their lives with the irreplaceable passion poured over them, learning their personalities and exploring how they best digest new concepts. Gone then, will be the much needed human interface from which I so greatly benefitted as many selfless public educators and administrators impacted my young life as a student. I greatly fear that - without advocates like myself weighing in behind the scenes to prevent it - the quiet movement already playing out before our legislators to push farther the silent consent toward electronic learning which will ultimately defeat the entire teacher - student interface, and our students' overall emotional, psychological, and yes, academic health may be lain at the altar of the next economic crisis affecting state coffers earmarked for education. Albeit unpopular among fellow Republicans whose campaign donations handsomely benefit from tech startups looking to capitalize on such opportunistic initiatives, I feel strongly this is too great a cost to pay.

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5. What can you do to foster a culture of support for educators and all those who work with children on a daily basis?

I think as a school board, we could be doing a better job of highlighting faculty and support professionals going the extra mile for their schools, their students, and finally...each other. I truly feel that if we were to better engage parents in recognizing our educators and support professionals on a regular basis, we would soon restore the unity between our administrators, educators, support staff, parents, and the general public, replacing that which has become an ominous culture of doubt and sometimes fear among, what I dare say is a medley of all of the above.

Additionally, I think we need to do a better job of limiting mass exposure of faculty and support professionals impacted by crisis intervention when those measures become necessary. I feel strongly that the solution to each crisis as it arises, needs to be critically examined to ensure that a solution is reached which addresses the specific problem at hand, a) to prevent exposing other educators and support staff en masse, who may have had no part in the specific crisis itself, and b) without consuming copious amounts of district dollars addressing problems best met instead by targeted action, sparing the remaining educators from the unnecessary resultant budget shortfalls.

6. How will you develop a positive working relationship with OCEA and OESP?

As it stands, the Okaloosa County School District has been without representation in the Florida Legislature since the deletion of the position of Program Director, Community Affairs. That said, I continue to work with legislators throughout the state of Florida, particularly Northwest Florida, having worked to get more than one of them elected. I assure you, my regular presence among our legislators both in district and at the state Capitol does not go without mention of our district's continued need for increased funding, as our district remains one of the lowest in the state for teacher salaries.

Moving forward, I hope to be able to continue those existing relationships while building relationships with OCEA and OESP representatives throughout the district to better ascertain exactly which needs OCEA and OESP feel would be best met by both my existing relationships with current and future legislators, as well as within my new role on the school board, if elected to serve.

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7. What is the primary function of a school board member today?

The primary function of a school board member today is to determine the best policies and procedures to be established and maintained to ensure an academic environment which is comfortable and conducive not only to learning, but also to instruction. We must work hard toward finding solutions to our forecasted budget shortfalls while maintaining and recruiting educational and support staff adequate to provide for the instruction of our school district's over 31,000 students. Additionally, we need desperately to identify other revenue streams by which we can address the many aging facilities constantly eroding the work environment of our faculty, support professionals, and students. I fully anticipate being able to work with our schools and legislators alike to identify and pursue these additional revenue streams.

8. What do you believe is the most important concern in our district and what is your plan to address it?

It's the money, Honey. Unfortunately, and especially now, following the most catastrophic economic event most of us will ever know in this lifetime, the most important concern in our school district is the need to identify alternative revenue streams, both to maintain our current educators and support professionals, but also to provide a quality academic environment for our faculty, support professionals, and students alike.

While some may argue that the most pressing issue is school safety, and I will admit, as a parent of three school age children, that safety, these days, is almost always a topic for public discussion when a school system has undergone the kind of turmoil ours has been battered by most recently, the bigger issue facing us during the next four years is - unquestionably - funding. Quite simply, the district needs money, and I'm the candidate best prepared to provide it.

Time still cures all wounds, after all, and the public scrutiny which has faced our district would be no exception, except that a parent, educator, student, or support professional - whose perception of safety has already been tainted by scandal - need not look any further than our aging facilities to find yet another set of reasons to doubt our fine district and our commitment to providing a healthy and productive educational environment.

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9. How would you work with legislators to positively impact education issues that affect this school district?

If elected to serve, I will continue to work closely with current and future legislators, only once elected, I will be better armed with the precise information necessary to adequately convey the issues currently facing our district's needs for additional educational funding. I am confident that my demonstrated ability to work with legislators in ways which keep their voters satisfied with their representation in the Florida legislature will prove instrumental in advancing the needs of the Okaloosa County School District, while keeping those in office who have demonstrated heartfelt interest in our diligent pursuit of those needs.

10. How to you plan to lead the district differently from our previous school board members?

Somewhat uniquely, I suppose, I have had the unfortunate disadvantage of having parented two school age children who have experienced abuse at the hand of a loved one. That said, I feel strongly that the best response to such adversities - and particularly when faced with the reality that those two children are now forced to realign with a parent they no longer trust - is to acknowledge that what happened was wrong, that it was not their fault, to allow them to freely express their feelings, and finally, yet perhaps most vital to the healing process and their continued success - to allow the actions of one person neither to influence the actions - nor their perception - of others. While I certainly don't condone abuse, our family motto is that of the late Walt Disney..."Keep Moving Forward."

Despite personal knowledge of the most notable abuse victim in this district, I maintain that the biggest tragedy, therein, is the manipulation of an entire electorate to believe our Okaloosa County School District as a whole, should continue suffering for what occurred as an isolated incident. What already tragically affected one student, has been escalated to invoke a firestorm torching the morale of an entire school district, and to our students' great misfortune. Going forth, educator morale in such crises MUST be better prioritized.