

Candidate Name -

Martha (Marti) Gardner

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?

When I was a media specialist, a peer, and I, planned and implemented a community-wide project to construct a stand-alone computer lab for our growing technology needs. The only funding came from community donations. This was at a time when schools didn't have a large number of computers or even labs. Our lab was considered a state-of-the-art facility consisting of a large interactive whiteboard, document camera, 30 computers with computer tables, two laser printers, and not to forget a restroom. The Destin Community donated the entire project from building materials, monetary donations, labor, hardware/software. The ribbon-cutting was a definite proud community moment. I experienced first-hand that involving a school's community to complete a needed project truly helps to grow a “school-community relationship.” As a principal, I helped design a creative way to have both music and art in an elementary school. This was accomplished under site-based budgeting and required thinking out of the box. With my SAC team, we reviewed the budget, created a fundraiser for necessary supplies, and made it happen.

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

Weakness

Some people call me a “bleeding heart” with a negative undertone, implying it's wrong. I am proud of my “bleeding heart,” especially when it comes to children. My passion is undeniable. Doing what's right for children has and always will drive my decisions. No matter what is needed.

Having many years of experience in several different levels in the OCSD, Facilities is a department I would like to have a better understanding of its budget and needs. I understood the needs for my individual school, but not necessarily understood the “big picture” at the district level. With a predicted sales tax shortfall, the upcoming ½ cent sales tax vote, aging buildings and infrastructure are just a few of the critical items facing the OCSD Facilities department. I plan to be educated!

Strengths

The mother of a high performing child and a special needs child along with 38 years of educational experience ranging from an ESE assistant, teacher, media specialist, district instructional technology specialist, principal, director of elementary education, and substituting after my retirement affords me a vast array of experience and insight into all aspects of the district. I consider my ability to work as a team member and with all ranges of people a specific strength. I respect others and have a willingness to compromise to find a workable solution for all involved. I am passionate about education and that will never end! You can count on me being an advocate for all.

3. What have I learned from my career that you think will help you become the type of SBM our district needs?

As a career educator, I have learned when you invest in and support our teachers; it is an investment in our children. I never want to lose my teacher's heart. I have witnessed individuals move up the promotional ladder only to forget what it's like in the classroom. As a school board member and an advocate for public education, I will work collaboratively with individuals of different beliefs and opinions to reach a common goal. I demonstrate respect for others and a willingness to compromise. Early in my career, I learned respect is earned, not given. After 38 years with the OCSD, I believe I have gained respect by being genuine, honest, and transparent. If elected, these qualities will most definitely continue.

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

First and foremost, we should continue to support the growing concern of mental illness in all school-aged children! This isn't a recent trend but an essential ongoing need.

Unfortunately, we are currently living what I believe will be a significant issue/trend for the remainder of this year and years to follow. Teachers and students left for spring break only to discover all instruction would be entirely online for the rest of the school year. First, a shout out to all OCSD employees! What a remarkable job the district, teachers, support staff have accomplished in a short time. It is an accurate indicator of doing whatever it takes for the children and real teamwork. With the possibility of future pandemics, hurricanes, or other types of emergencies, our school district should consider developing an online plan to implement within short notice. For this to transpire, it requires new technology for our students in need, professional development for teachers, and CRAs, followed by ongoing student/parent training. In my opinion, this training should be the first training upon returning. Several of my teacher friends shared, "it would have been so much smoother to implement if the teacher had provided training to their students and parents at the beginning of the year on how to log in and navigate the provided instructional programs." They continued to say, "it will now be a part of their "welcome back" information and ongoing classroom usage." One last thought, do we need to issue a device for every child at the beginning of middle school and high school? Teachers would need to be using technology as part of their instruction, grading, turning in assignments, etc. Many many districts in our nation are doing this.

5. What Can I do to Foster a Culture of Support for Education and all Those Who Work with Children on a Daily Basis?

I am a cheerleader for education and have always been! I am immersed in my community and county and have no problem going to bat for the teachers and students in OCSD whether that means attending Chamber of Commerce meetings, Kiwanis or Rotary meetings, public gatherings such as Fall festivals, Veteran's Day ceremonies, etc. We do not have the resources to purchase the needs for all. However, just as with our family budgets, we must prioritize the essentials and wants. I believe the needs of children should take priority. As a leader, a previous administrator, I discovered one of the most effective ways to culture support is to have a genuine "open door" policy, actually listen to their needs, observe, and come up with a solution collaboratively on how best to support the individual or group. I would encourage them to bring solutions with them to examine. I often told my staffs that I do not have all the answers, but working as a team, we can find a solution

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

I have always felt that I had a positive relationship with OCEA and OESP because I believed that it is imperative to work together as a team in order to have a successful, happy place to work and go to school. Due to my protective and supportive nature towards my students and employees, I am proud to say, a dispute nor grievance was ever filed against me. As a board member I want to continue to build a positive working relationship with OCEA and OESP. I would first like to meet the executive committee of each organization, listen to their goals and concerns, and if allowed, attend some of the building representative meetings. How do you build a working relationship if you are "hands off" and from a distance? Our teachers and support staff should have a say in how our district operates and should feel free to bring their concerns to their administration or school board member without fear of retaliation. Hopefully, through my open-mindedness and non-conformational personality, OCEA and OESP members will feel comfortable to contact me when needed. I am committed to listening first, to lead thoughtfully and respectfully, and to build strong partnerships with individuals and organizations.

7. What is the primary function of a School Board member today?

I will abide by the district policy which states, "The School Board's major function is to develop and adopt District policy governing many facets of school operations. The Board can adopt policy upon the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools and delegates implementation of those policies to the Superintendent. The Board is responsible for approval and adoption of an annual budget that provides the basis for the buildings, furnishings, staff, materials, and equipment needed to carry out all educational programs. School Board Members are elected county-wide and are responsible for the governance of all schools in the County.

If elected, I will uphold the district and state statutes first and foremost. I will work every day for *all* students to succeed, for every educator to be the very best they can be, and for safe, healthy, and successful schools. I will take every opportunity to promote our school district's success within our community and state.

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

It is challenging to select one of the below over another. I would hope to address all:

- Safe and healthy schools to include access to mental health services to all students in need of support
- ESE – *Due to having a son with special needs this is personally near and dear to me and a department I will work closely with*
- Aging Facilities - rickety portables, uncovered ramps, aging buses, leaking roofs, HVAC units are going out, etc.

We need to have a detailed strategic plan, but before attempting to generate a plan, I would first want to meet with stakeholders of each department, review their budget, hear what is currently taking place, the reasoning behind their decisions, and what is needed to better their program? I want to look outside of Okaloosa county and find practical researched-based applications and implement them with fidelity. Most importantly, measured goals and a timeline would be created and added to the plan before proceeding on any new project. I often wonder why we buy "things" without doing proper research or follow up on the effectiveness of the program. We do not have money to waste on frivolous ideas. We have a lot of good going on in our school district, and I would like to see us get to "state of the art" in some of the areas mentioned above.

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

Legislators need to hear from local school board members and stakeholders when they face issues that affect the schools in their district. In doing so, I would like to meet with our local legislators to build a relationship of trust and transparency and would strongly encourage them to visit our schools, actually spend time in classrooms, experience first-hand what educators are dealing with, and participate in teacher meetings that deal with upcoming legislation. I have never been able to understand how an individual can vote on something when they haven't done their homework. And, we all know it happens more than we realize. Hopefully, with a strong partnership, our local legislators would provide an insight into what is coming down the educational pipelines and a list of individuals to contact at the state level. I believe it is all about knowing your legislators, promoting an honest relationship, understanding the issues, and building an ongoing alliance.

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

As mentioned earlier, I believe there is a lot of good and great our district and current school board members are doing. Former Board member, Mr. Rodney Walker believed, "if you take care of your employees, they will take care of you. I have always followed that rule. Principals and teachers have an extremely difficult job in today's world. As a school board member, I promise to respect and support these individuals. As far as doing something different than current school board members, I would want to meet with district leaders to determine their needs. After all, an essential part of being a school board member is to support the individuals I work for. I am committed to listening first, to leading thoughtfully and respectfully, to following state statute, and building strong partnerships to find the best solutions for our children in Okaloosa county