

9 QUESTIONS FROM



Michelle Bonczek For Hernando County School Board District 4

1. Why are you running? If elected, what would be your top goals as school board member?

I am running for the sole purpose of making our district the best it can be. Where all kids get a safe and appropriate education. Where parents want their kids to attend public. A district where teachers and non-instructional employees want to stay and feel valued. A district where new teachers want to come and work for.

Safety and security advocating for K-9-unit, Focused Development in Exceptional Student Education Programs, Transparency in our budget and funding allocations. To create a streamlined conservative approach to a fiscally sound budget. Addressing transportation issues. Our current infrastructure and future school development. Collaboration Between ALL stakeholder.

2. What can be done to ensure everyone who graduates is either ready for college or a vocation?

Make sure the framework is in place. Essential skills into the curriculum, make sure there are a set of principles that will act as its model. Make sure each level of the program has its own distinct learning goals. Assessments that are consistent throughout.

3. How should the district address underperforming schools?

Turn around schools begin with a plan. A set of strategies that take in account needs of the student population. School leaders should set the tone that facilitates teaching and learning. Demonstrating authenticity and credibility within their school. Securing tangible improvements and a commitment to putting the need of children first.

4. Local and state initiatives have been launched to address the need for more teachers in our classrooms. What more do you think needs to be done to recruit and retain teachers in your district?

Teacher Retention is essential with quality teachers. High turnover rate of teachers shows lower academic success. The pay scale has to be competitive with other districts. Current teachers need to feel valued and respected.

5. What is your stance on the state's current school choice program?

Every child should be able to receive the best education they can. Although the states program of school vouchers will take from public school funding. Parents don't always understand private schools

do not have to follow DOE, IDEA, or FAPE. Private schools do not have to have highly certified teachers in subject areas or even have a certification by DOE.

6. Does school testing really give an accurate portrayal of the education quality/experience of a school? **Not always as some students do not do well at standardized test, some children may have a disability.**

7. Issues surrounding gender, sexuality and race have created controversy between school boards and parents. How much say should parents have in deciding what is and is not included in the public school curriculum?

Schools and school boards should be transparent with curriculum. Transparency in public education is critical. Gaurdian and/or Parents, should have a say in what is being taught to their children. Although, curriculum in schools is set by state which is supposed to use curriculum that aligns with BEST standards. There is also community input committee when adopting any new curriculum books in our schools. If the district follows law, policy and procedure there would be more trust from the parents, students and staff

8. Do you feel students are safe at school? Or does more need to be done to protect school campuses?

There are always things that can be done to make a school safer. Schools need to be secure and safe from outside threat, as well as inside threats. Our buildings must also be structural safe and free from any environmental hazards as well. When students feel safe, they are more likely to attend school regularly, resulting in higher achievement levels. Comprehensive School Safety Assessments, Anonymous Reporting Systems, Campus, Building and Classroom Security, Mental Health Resources, Social Media Monitoring social media alerting system, k-9 units in schools.

9. Do you feel any changes are needed to your district's budget? Is money being spent in the right places?

Without a forensic approach to our district budget, I cannot give a just cause in changes in our budget, although School districts need to manage budgets more efficiently and appropriately.

9 QUESTIONS FROM



Meet the Candidate: Gregg Laskoski

1. Why are you running? If elected, what would be your top goals as school board member?

Over the past 16 years I've had extensive involvement with Hernando schools. I began by serving on School Advisory Councils (SAC) at Challenger K8 and Nature Coast Technical H.S. That's where I learned about our district's funding history. Since researching the Florida Education Funding Program (FEFP), I've advocated for correction because our district remains in the lowest quadrant of funding. My top goals simultaneously include: improving Education Quality (teacher salaries and non-instructional staff); effective Growth Management; and pursuit of proper Funding; FEFP; extension of the Half-Cent for Schools and Millage). Without sufficient funding improving education could remain an elusive goal.

2. What can be done to ensure everyone who graduates is either ready for college or a vocation?

It is essential to enable a successful path forward for every high school student. The opportunities now materializing for Hernando students include promising opportunities for career training at Wilton Simpson Technical College. Additionally, the school district has developed a strong relationship with Pasco-Hernando State College, local industries and private sector partners to provide pathways toward college, workforce and military options as well. Are our students and parents fully aware of all the resources available to them? We need to help students explore the possibilities early on and provide parent-approved mentoring from qualified professionals in the respective fields of interest.

3. How should the district address underperforming schools?

In order to effectively address 'underperforming' schools, we need to learn the root causes of the problem. And, conversely, what enables the well-performing schools to consistently succeed? The key to success is often a blend of adequate resources; experienced, well-qualified staff; and, effective dialogue with parents. When parents, students and teachers are on the same page the results are often favorable. Adequate funding that appropriately provides up-to-date resources; technology and compensates experienced, well-qualified teachers is often instrumental in fostering very positive outcomes.

4. Local and state initiatives have been launched to address the need for more teachers in our classrooms. What more do you think needs to be done to recruit and retain teachers in your district?

Rather than reducing the criteria for hiring qualified teachers, it would be preferable to focus on raising the bar and improving the teaching experience. If it were only about low wages, the teacher shortage we see in Florida and nationwide could be addressed expeditiously. Teaching is a profession and it should be treated as such and properly compensated. While Gov. DeSantis' initiative to increase the starting teacher salary (for those with no experience) to \$47,500 offered a welcome piece of the puzzle, it simultaneously created an unfunded mandate; for districts to proportionately increase salaries for their more experienced teachers.

5. What is your stance on the state's current school choice program?

Subsidizing private schools should not be imposed on taxpayers and should be a consideration only when no reasonable alternative among the district's public schools is available.

6. Does school testing really give an accurate portrayal of the education quality/experience of a school?

Certainly not as a single measure. But testing is a fair way to measure students on state standards growth over time. Generally speaking, the best portrayal of the education quality & experience comes from the parents' reflections on the growth that they've seen and experienced with their kids; AND, the students' views on their own preparedness for the path they're choosing beyond graduation. Have they learned how to think; how to continue to educate themselves; how to become a productive citizen?

7. Issues surrounding gender, sexuality and race have created controversy between school boards and parents. How much say should parents have in deciding what is and is not included in the public school curriculum?

We've seen a disproportionate amount of time consumed by board members, parents and political groups using Board meetings to remove objectionable books from school libraries; and, serve as a platform between the political 'Right' and 'Left'. Board meetings are meant to conduct the business of the school district. Because individual recitation of sexually graphic or obscene book passages violates district policies and state statutes, book challenges should be expedited elsewhere. Without question, schools must continue to comply with FL curriculum mandates; and, welcome parental input from all individual parents; board member representation; and, our respective School Advisory Councils (SAC).

8. Do you feel students are safe at school? Or does more need to be done to protect school campuses?

Students need to feel safe at all times while on campus. That includes safety from physical or mental abuse from other students and specifically, bullying. 'Zero tolerance' is not just a talking point. It should be strictly enforced. As far as external threats go, school districts are required to have safety professionals on staff to monitor and measure threat risk and continually ensure we have full coverage with School Resource Officers; updated security technology; etc.

9. Do you feel any changes are needed to your district's budget? Is money being spent in the right places?

While our needs are many, salaries & benefits totaling \$188.8 million consume approximately 80% of our General Fund. The district's financial team has long been recognized by the FL Auditor General for 'financial reporting excellence' so finding 'wasteful spending' or hidden funds is unlikely. Our 2024-25 proposed budget relies on key contingencies; i.e., voter approval of the millage extension which designates 50% for salaries and positions; 25% for mental health and safety; 15% for technology and 10% for continuation of academic programs. Similarly, if voters extend the half-cent sales tax for schools, that enables new school construction; infrastructure, & repairs.