

9 QUESTIONS FROM



Meet the Candidate: Lynn Gray

1. Why are you running? If elected, what would be your top goals as school board member? 8 years, senior board member, past Chair of HCPS Board,
 - a. To continue on my diversity district wide groups which we meet monthly: African American Task Force, Hispanic Forum, Human Trafficking, Student Online Safety, Hillsborough Healthy Schools, and on the Children's Board.
 - b. To continue to work on Affordable Housing for Teachers with Mayor Castor and our district Operations; along with continuing to fight for a raise of teacher and staff salaries
 - c. To continue expansive of workforce development in all middle schools-as an introduction, and our high schools for dual enrollment and industry certification
 - d. To retain financial security with an average fund balance (money in reserves) at 15% or more-which stabilizes our credit rating.
 - e. To continue expanding on social studies curriculum which matches our student demographics.
 - f. To keep the focus and funding for mental health initiatives for our students.Much more...
2. What can be done to ensure everyone who graduates is either ready for college or a vocation?
 - a. Each student has a clear path now; that of a college bound student or going for industry certification. Both options are more realistic and available but communication via parents must be much more increased.
 - b. We are now integrating two big opportunities for our students: 1. A more robust vocational tech to job certification-Future Career Academy, and 2. Communicating to students they can do both; go for a college degree and become industry certified.
3. How should the district address underperforming schools?
 - a. Over the years, since I have been on the board, we added human resources which acted as a band aid. Since the HB 1-Voucher Bill many schools have lost FTE-cheeks in the seats=millions of dollars. With those vouchers many students now go to private or charter schools and do homeschooling as well. Thus, we must close those schools which are now less than half enrolled. We can re-purpose or sell the school site and/or property.
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? We must add the millage-pay increase-to teachers and staff members. All surrounding counties plus 13 others have a differential of \$10,000 for teachers, guidance counselors, mental health, etc., and up to \$75,000 more for administrators

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

The state grades came out; revealing our district went down from 39 D schools to 9, and from 5 F schools to none. The charter schools – “choice” revealed an upward trend of more D and F rated schools; there is no existing fiscal, academic, school safety, curriculum, discipline oversight for charter schools nor homeschools. My stance is to invest money in public schools teaching positions so we can get back to taking care of our students with effective teachers and staff- which are leaving due to lack of competitive salaries.

6. Does school testing really give an accurate portrayal of the education quality/experience of a school? No. I have taught since 1976, Elementary, Middle, and High School-all before testing came out. We taught are kids just fine with high graduations and semester exam scores. Testing now had negatively identified kids and school sites with a letter grade...with little if any holistic student-centered assessments.
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? Teachers have professional degrees; B.A, M.S., and Doctoral degrees; they are trained to know what is best for children with a continual slew of professional development. My first 30 years as an educator, especially at Jesuit, parents worked with us as professionals and regarded us with respect. Since 2018, with leadership from the State of Florida introducing conflicting “cultural” norms, our teachers are now being slammed with book challenges, pronoun challenges, LGBTQ identity challenges, and the list goes on.
8. Do you feel students are safe at school? Or does more need to be done to protect school campuses? Yes, the Stoneman Douglas Safety Act provisions and criteria have set up schools to become “hardened” and are now considered the safest public place for our children to be in. Our HCPS Chief Newman leads all other Florida districts in safety directives and under his leadership our schools are extremely safe. Sheriff Chronister and the City of Tampa, plus our District wide mayors all work together in helping our district protect children and young adults.
9. Do you feel any changes are needed to your district's budget? Is money being spent in the right places? Yes, a) schools which are below 2/3 full must be re-purposed or sold, b) our secretaries and key supervisory positions must be consolidated. Each leadership position needs to be evaluated in part on how they are helping save our district money. Examples: Are they promoting solar panels at school sites to save electricity, are they consolidating their secretaries, are they substituting in school site classes at least one per week...???

9 QUESTIONS FROM



Meet The Candidate: Karen Bendorf

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

As a dedicated teacher in the trenches every day, I am deeply concerned about several pressing issues:

1. Declining Literacy Rates: An increasing number of students are unable to read basic content at grade level. They lack the foundational skills necessary to become proficient readers, which hinders their overall academic progress.

2. Rampant Violence and Misbehavior: Violent and destructive behaviors are more prevalent in our schools than ever before. These issues often go unaddressed, as students bring guns and weapons, assault peers, teachers and staff, vandalize school property, defy school policies and classroom procedures, and disrespect authority.

3. Budget Management Concerns: I am extremely concerned that despite having access to a \$4.4 billion dollar budget, we continue to face financial mismanagement issues. It is troubling that we persist in asking taxpayers to fund our projects without demonstrating effective stewardship of the resources we already have.

These are just some of the issues that need urgent attention to ensure a safe and effective learning environment for all students.

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

We need to prioritize making sure our students are literate and can function as strong readers and writers, otherwise our graduation rates are just a meaningless number. Students should be receiving instruction and remediation using scientifically based reading instruction best practices. Studies and data have shown with MRI evidence how the brain best learns to read. When children are strong readers, they will thrive in whatever they choose to do. Then, with parental guidance, when students are ready to pursue a skill or an interest, they should have access to options for high quality training in vocational or professional development to prepare them for life as competent, confident, and productive citizens after graduation.

3. How should the district address underperforming schools?

One of the greatest challenges facing underperforming schools is teacher turnover and vacancy in classrooms. Even though teachers can earn up to \$15,000 extra per year to teach in many of these schools, we still struggle to keep positions filled. This raises several important questions about the underlying issues. One significant factor contributing to teachers' reluctance to remain at these school sites is student behavior. Even with higher compensation, the behavioral issues in these schools deter many educators. To address this, we must raise expectations for both behavior and academic performance in our schools. Students need to be held accountable for adhering to school and classroom policies and should come to school every day with the mindset that their job is to do their best work. To improve teacher retention and student performance in underperforming schools, we need a multifaceted approach. This includes creating a positive and supportive school environment, implementing clear and consistent behavioral expectations, and providing targeted, high-quality reading instruction. By addressing these issues, we can create a more stable and effective educational experience for both teachers and students.

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?

When teachers and administrators feel supported in making the best decisions for their students' growth in classrooms, we can transform the culture in our schools and attract others. Teachers care deeply about students and want to see them thrive and grow as learners. However, when they must routinely deal with the burden of repetitive and unaddressed behaviors in classrooms, they become weary and frustrated, especially when their evaluation scores are tied to issues beyond their control. By holding students accountable to a higher standard, we can relieve the extra strain on teachers, allowing them to focus on what they love: teaching children.

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

It is such a privilege to live in a state that grants parent's numerous options for choosing what is best for their child. Having these choices is ultimately a win for children, opening avenues to meet their needs in the most productive environment that might not have otherwise been available. When we do what is best for children, we are ensuring that our next generation of leaders will be well-prepared.

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

While school ratings are often a general indicator of overall direction, they do not reflect every student, teacher, staff member, or administrator in that school. There are many excellent students and staff members in every school who work hard daily to do their best. However, the data can help us identify areas in our large district that need focus and provide specific details that need to be addressed at a school site. Administrators and teachers can also use this data to guide support and training efforts.

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?

Parents should always have a say and know what is being taught in their children's classrooms. Issues surrounding gender, sexuality, and race should not be topics for our classrooms. Our children have so much to learn, and those subjects are for parents to discuss with their children at home, not for teachers and school staff to discuss outside of a parent's purview.

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

While it's crucial to stay vigilant and not let our guard down regarding school safety, we can take comfort in the robust training, procedures, and protections we have in place. We owe a great deal of gratitude to our local law enforcement, particularly the hundreds of deputies from the Sheriff's office who are present on our campuses to safeguard students from external threats.

However, my primary concern lies within our schools. When students are exposed repeatedly to unacceptable behavior that goes unchecked in classrooms and hallways, it leads to trauma and desensitization to dangerous and unhealthy actions. This inconsistency in addressing behavioral issues sends a troubling message: that there are no clear standards or expectations. This lack of clarity creates confusion and weakens our overall behavioral standards. We have the capacity to do better. Let's work together to establish and uphold clear, consistent expectations to ensure a safer and more supportive environment for all students.

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

We need responsibility, accountability, and transparency in our \$4.4B budget. We need to prioritize making our classroom resources efficient and productive, paying our teachers and support staff on a competitive scale, and eliminating needless waste by ending unnecessary contracts and streamlining systems and maintenance procedures.

9 QUESTIONS FROM



Meet the Candidate: Johnny Bush

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

I am a product of generational poverty and public education. America, Florida, and HCPS will continue to grapple with these challenges well beyond our lifetime. As a student-centered educator, I believe that every child matters, and this is my driving motivation.

I firmly believe the majority of educators enter this field with a deep desire to make a positive impact on their students' lives. However, when we fail to compensate teachers appropriately, respect them, and support them, we often end up with individuals who are unable to give their best to our students. How can we claim to put students first if we do not work to surround them with the best educators possible? This lack of support is reflected in our student performance.

I am running for this position to highlight the importance of supporting those who work with our most precious resource—our students.

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

As a former high school principal, it was very important to identify incoming ninth graders who were performing below expectations and provide additional resources to ensure their success. We must continue to identify students who are struggling at every level and provide the necessary support. The resources I speak of often come in the form of additional staff. Again, we must pay and respect people in this field.

3. How should the district address underperforming schools?

Schools tend to underperform when they are understaffed or lack the experienced staff that other schools may have. The workload is different at a struggling school. We need to incentivize and support teachers to work in these schools and stay in these schools. Teachers make the difference.

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?

First, paying teachers a competitive salary is a sign of respect for their profession. Money fixes a lot of problems, but we must also address working conditions. Teachers are working in oversized classrooms, dealing with disruptive student behavior, constant use of cell phones, and lack of parent involvement, to name a few. Let's acknowledge these conditions and address them.

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

The current school choice program is state mandated. I personally think Hillsborough County is saturated with charter schools, and we do not need any more of them. However, we do need to hold them accountable to the same standards as our public schools. I also believe that if we are doing our job and making our public schools the best they can possibly be, there will be less need for charter schools and people utilizing school choice options.

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

In my personal opinion, I do not believe testing gives an accurate portrayal of the education quality and experience of a school. There are so many factors that go into a student's or a school's performance.

Testing cannot be the sole determiner of how well students perform. Although testing is used to evaluate

schools, we must also look at the teaching conditions and learning conditions.

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?

Parent involvement has always been very important to our education system. While it's difficult to quantify how much say a parent should have, I will advocate for having systems and protocols in place and sticking to them. If there's a process in place that does not seem to be working, we need to review it and tweak or revamp it as necessary.

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

As a principal of two high schools in Hillsborough County, I could never look a parent in the face and say

that schools are 100% safe. We absolutely need to do more each and every day to protect school campuses. The best thing we can do is communicate with our kids. I am a strong advocate of encouraging kids to “say something if they hear or see something.” Families must continue or get back to having conversations with their children and encouraging them to speak up and understand that it’s OK to speak up.

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

People claim to understand the budget, but in my opinion, few actually do. I believe the school board needs to be accountable for understanding the budget. One of my first initiatives would be to ensure that we, as a board, have an accountant who will report directly to us after conducting checks and balances with the chief financial officer of our district. This will ensure we truly understand the budget. Eighty percent of our budget goes to salaries, and I believe this money is being spent appropriately. If we need to review the other 20%, I will start with the numerous programs our district funds each year.