

9 QUESTIONS FROM



Heather Felton, Candidate for Manatee County School Board, District 1.

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

Parents, teachers, and school staff have very little voice when it comes to the school board. Most of the current board members have not worked in our schools or had children in our district. I want to advocate for these groups and be a voice for them on the board.

My top goals are 1) Fair and equitable pay for teachers and paras. Florida is ranked 50th for average teacher salary. The compression of the pay scale has teachers with ten years of experience earning the same as a starting teachers and provides no incentive for experienced teachers to stay or develop in their careers. We need to retain - not just hire - teachers.

2) Ensuring that parents have access to the services they need for their children to succeed. Parents struggle to advocate for their children because they don't know the system or what steps they need to take to get their child access to programs for learning disabilities or mental health care.

3) Advocating for and prioritizing the needs of our students. The priority should be making decisions and voting in favor of policies that benefit the kids foremost. The kids - and by extension the staff and parents - should always be the focus.

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

While we can't force every child to choose college or a vocation, we need to make sure they have the option. Continued or expanded access to advanced classes for college credits, dual enrollment, programs like AVID, and presentations about the variety of college programs available will enable students to select the college options right for them. Expanding vocational training at all high schools is also important, as well as access to MTC, fellowships and apprenticeships, and business partnerships that give students a look at what types of jobs are out there will help our students learn marketable skills that will lead to successful careers. Furthermore, the military is also a viable option and we need to embrace it as a potential opportunity for our students.

3. How should the district address underperforming schools?

These need to be addressed on a case-by-case basis. Just as every child is different, so is every school population. The district must first determine what each school needs to help them succeed. What programs do they need? What additional staff? Where are kids struggling? How can we help them? Punishing the school staff and students isn't going to get improvement. Equity is key to success.

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?

As I stated above, we need to retain teachers by fairly compensating them for their experience and expertise. The compression of the pay scale must be addressed. Continuing education for teachers should provide needed skills, not the same information year after year so that experienced teachers have nothing to gain from attending. Finally, the teachers need to feel support from the School Board and Superintendent, as well as their school's administration. Teachers who flounder need to be supported and built up rather than be left in fear of reprisal for poor performance.

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

Public funds should go to public schools. Charters have a place in our school system as long as they are held accountable to the same requirements as the district's schools. Private schools should not benefit from public funds.

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

Not at all. Not every child tests well and their responses on a multiple-choice test don't show knowledge growth. It shows a child's ability to memorize data, steps, or rules. It doesn't show that they know how to think, to make decisions, or to extrapolate from what they've learned and apply it in a new way.

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?

Public school curriculum is set by the state, not the district or the parents or, indeed, by educational experts like teachers. This leaves those parents (as well as teachers and other educational experts) unable to do much in terms of setting curriculum.

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

Our district is taking strong steps to ensure the safety of our students and I support what is being done at our district and schools. I don't like metal detectors, etc., on our campuses, but as long as weapons are freely available to the public, we must do whatever we can to keep our kids safe.

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

Generally, I feel that our district's budget is where it should be. Of course, I think changes need to be at in terms of teacher and para pay, but otherwise we have auditors and the Citizens Financial Oversight Committee working hard to ensure that the money is going where it should be.

9 QUESTIONS FROM



Meet the Candidate: Alex Garner

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

I am running because I love this community and I am always looking for ways to serve it. If elected, I plan to fortify the strategic growth plan already in place; we are currently a B district, and I would like to see us become an A district. I hope to focus more on early childhood education and start our growth with our youngest learners to close gaps and strengthen our readers.

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

The past two summers I had the opportunity to work with the MTC Summer Discovery Program. This program is a great way to establish the expectations of vocation programs and show students options they have right here in our county. We need to also ensure student have their soft skills such as public speaking, teamwork, and critical thinking mastered at the high school level before graduation.

3. How should the district address underperforming schools?

I think first and foremost we need to analyze why the school is underperforming and not only plan to help those schools as a whole, but also meet their individual needs. As I mentioned I think more focus on early childhood education would greatly benefit our students, but especially for schools who could use a running start or underperform more often than others.

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?

Our district needs to have competitive salaries for incoming teachers while also guaranteeing the same or better growth for established teachers.

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

I strongly believe in parental rights and that parent's school be able to decide what the best educational environment for their child is.

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

Yes and no. Testing is not a perfect system; there are so many factors in testing and so much pressure for both teachers and students that results are bound to be askew.

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?

Once again I believe in parental rights but our curriculum needs to be what is most beneficial to our students and their future. Schools were founded on reading, writing, and arithmetic.

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

I do think students are safe. The Guardian program, for example, was an excellent implementation for our school and student safety. I think we need to continue to be diligent about safety and always be aware of potential new threats and think of how to best keep our students safe before they arrive on campuses, once they leave, and at our after-school programs.

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

I am fiscally conservative so I believe we should always monitor the budget and make sure we are not spending money on unneeded personnel or capital expenditures.

9 QUESTIONS FROM



Meet the Candidate: Mark Stanoch

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

With two grandchildren enrolled in district schools, I want to ensure that they, and all children, receive the best education possible to prepare them to become productive members of society as well as good citizens. Being a member of the Manatee County School Board will allow me to give back to the community in a meaningful way. I bring skills that have been absent from the board for far too long. The Board Members should bring varied skills to the table. I have three primary goals: Improve grade level reading, enhance local community control and engagement, and provide fiscal insight.

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

I believe that career-relevant knowledge and skills must be part of the learning experience. To achieve this, businesses need to partner with educators to identify the skills necessary to succeed in careers and help incorporate them into curriculum. Hosting "Career Discovery Days", establishing work/study programs, providing job shadowing opportunities, and creating apprenticeships with local businesses may be part of the solution. Local community members who are retired from industry should represent an important resource in these efforts. Programs dedicated to specific industries can be established to address local needs and retirees can become resources to help support the initiatives.

3. How should the district address underperforming schools?

Florida Statute 1001.42 (18) identifies schools which are graded "D" or "F" as subject to a school improvement plan. The goal of the school board is to have policies and support programs that ensure the highest level of performance possible and that there are no "D" or lower rated schools. Accountability for acceptable performance rests with the Superintendent and the Administration. The Executive Director of School Improvement is accountable for development and execution of school improvement plans. My priority will be to review these plans and work in concert with the Administration and all stakeholders to bring about innovative change.

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 need to make teachers' salaries competitive and find more ways to reward exceptional performance by our teachers. There should also be opportunities for teachers to enhance their careers. One way this can be accomplished is by funding additional professional education for teachers and support graduate degree studies. We also must ensure that we have well equipped and supplied classrooms that allow our teachers to focus on their core mission of delivering an excellent learning experience for all children. Unnecessary distractions take away from Teacher-Student interaction and place an undue burden on our professional staff. We must do better.

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

I strongly support the free enterprise system and know from experience that competition breeds better performance in any market. I applaud the Governor and State Legislature for school legislation that allows choice. However, with choice comes responsibility. We must ensure that alternative schools are held to the same high standards of performance as our Manatee County Public Schools. The district must effectively and clearly communicate all the benefits of attending public schools and our corresponding performance metrics. Most importantly, driving the district towards an "A" rated school system will make our schools much more desirable and competitive.

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

While standardized test scores provide a baseline of performance and a basis for comparison, they require context. I believe that teachers provide a much more accurate measure of student performance and experience. There will always be discussion and, potentially, controversy about the validity of specific testing and measurement systems. However, standardized testing provides a benchmark from which we, the district stakeholders, can further evaluate effectiveness and educational quality to determine improvement strategies as warranted. They present an opportunity to understand how our students compare to other districts. And, with that knowledge, we can seek better paths to success.

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?

I am a strong advocate of Parental Rights. I support the Parents' Bill of Rights as outlined in Title XLIX of Florida Statutes. Parents, as one of the stakeholders in our education system, should have input to the decisions of all instructional material. Given the diversity in our district, we must allow parents to exercise their rights by having the ability to "Opt-In" to curricula for their children. There needs to be more local control of curricula, to the full extent permitted under Florida Law, to reflect the values and needs of the local community.

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

The new laws passed in the current and prior legislative sessions have done much to protect the welfare of our students. However, scanning for weapons and additional security to prevent unauthorized access to facilities and events should be deployed quickly. I am a proponent of regular review and evaluation of safety protocols to determine where deficiencies exist. Plans need to be tested and exercised to determine fail points and adjusted as needed to increase levels of protection. We must be vigilant in ensuring that entry access controls and monitoring are uniformly implemented, and procedures followed without exception.

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

Budgets are based on assumptions and forecasts. Currently, checks and balances review how our funds are being spent, or what we call "financial *oversight*." There is a need to expand our methods and analyze how and why expenditures are made. We need to transform our internal reviews into "financial *insight*." This requires a better job of evaluating the effectiveness of and results achieved from budgeted items. The implementation of financial insight will allow us to spend smartly. With nearly \$1.4billion in spending, we should be able to find innovative ways to equip and supply classrooms and attract and retain great teachers.