Delaware PTA 2015 School Board Candidate Q &A

1. Introduction: My name is Michelle Wall. The main reason I am running is because I am an involved parent in the district. I will do all that I can to encourage more parents to get involved in our schools. This involvement is critical to support our teachers and advance the success of our students. Parent involvement touches every issue from student achievement, curriculum, standardized tests and teacher evaluations. The first way to get involved is to vote in our upcoming school board election.

Work History: Office of the Governor (Virginia), Friends of the Library NC State University, The Raleigh News & Observer, The Arizona Republic and the Appoquinimink School District

Community Service: Silver Lake Elementary- PTA Member, Parent Lighthouse Team, Title One Committee, Weekly Classroom Volunteer ; Multiple Sclerosis Society Greater Delaware Valley Chapter– 2014 Volunteer of the Year, MSquerade Event Chair, Emerging Leaders Council, MS Walk Team Captain; Girl Scout Troop Leader; Easter Seals Emerging Leaders Committee; Leadership Delaware Class of 2014 and Leadership Delaware Alumni Council

2. There continues to be a focus on full inclusion in our schools statewide. What are your thoughts on inclusion? If elected, how would you ensure our educators receive adequate professional development on inclusion strategies, implementation if IEPs, diversity training for teachers and students and the necessary supports for sustained and successful inclusion?

Inclusion ensures that schools provide equal educational opportunities for children with disabilities. IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) requires that students receive this support through the least restrictive environment.

Speaking specifically to inclusion in the Appoquinimink school district, we contracted with Stetson and Associates to implement the Stetson Model of Inclusion. We need to take an in depth look in each school to make sure that teachers are being given adequate time and support to implement the suggested model to encourage positive outcomes for the individual student. I also want to make sure that the district is informing the parents of the models/strategies that are being used as well.

3. The state is facing a very turbulent time with different implementation efforts around recent resolutions and even legislative bills supporting a Parent’s Right to opt out of the state assessments and to potentially move toward less testing and more teaching and learning. What are your views on this issue and why?

The decision for a student to opt-out of a state assessment needs to be a conversation between a parent and a teacher to determine what is right for the individual student. As a parent of two students in the district I am always in favor of more teaching and learning than assessment.

4. Do you support teacher accountability based on the results of the statewide student assessment results (SBAC)? What role do you think state assessments should play in student accountability?

I understand why so many parents and teachers are concerned with the Smarter Balanced Assessment. I do believe we need to have some sort of measure of what children are learning, but I don’t believe that the Smarter Balanced Assessment is necessarily the answer.

In addition, I don’t believe that teacher accountability should be based on the results of students’ standardized testing scores.

Pertaining to the implementation and results of the Smarter Balanced Assessment, I would like there to be a more effective way to channel parents’ input and have an open dialogue on how it impacts both teachers and students in our district.

5. It is said that many of Delaware public high schools are referred to as dropout factories and that our students lack the 21st Century skills necessary to compete globally. What do you see as the state’s role versus the local district’s role in increasing graduation rates? How would you improve 21st Century Learning in your district?

The Appoquinimink school district has been making significant progress with lowering the dropout rates, going from 2.1% in 2011-12 to 0.7% in 2012 -13 (19 students out of 2,786). This success has been credited to the implementation of several recommendations of a special district wide committee that was established in 2011. It includes strategies such as identifying at risk kids, increasing parent involvement, offering a flexible and/or extended school day and increasing vocational opportunities.

Ultimately, the individual districts are responsible for their individual dropout rates. However, there are current programs being rolled out statewide such as the Delaware Pathways to Prosperity program that can be used to support initiatives that the Appoquinimink school district has already began to implement. The Delaware Pathways to Prosperity program establish partnerships between local employers, universities, and school districts to equip students with 21st century skills to allow students to compete globally. We should continue to support these statewide efforts that help EVERY student become college and/or career ready.

6. During times of fiscal constraint, what programs would you consider essential to keep in order to maintain the current level of education in your district and why?

During times of fiscal constraint, I would need to take all factors of the individual situation into consideration before eliminating any programs. It is hard to make a hypothetical decision without knowing the actual facts of the situation. As times change something that we consider essential today may not be considered essential when the decision needs to be made. In addition to the core curriculum, I value the arts, language, and the STEM programs that we currently offer in our district.

7. How do you feel about family engagement in areas such as shared decision-making at the building and district level?

I would like to see an increase of parent/community involvement to support our teachers. The success of our district is based on a positive relationship between teachers, parents, and students working together to achieve greatness.

8. Do you believe extracurricular activities are necessary?

Yes, I believe extracurricular activities are necessary to achieve a healthy mind and body balance. Our goal as parents should be to create well-rounded community members.

9. Do you feel that subjects such as music, art, physical education, technology, and foreign languages play an important part in a child’s education? Explain.

Yes. I feel that subjects such as music, art, physical education, technology, and foreign languages play an important part in a child’s education because they help create a well-rounded student. Students excel in different areas and I think it is important to provide exposure to a vast number of opportunities.

During my campaign for this position I have had the opportunity to attend many school sponsored events. I have been reminded that there is a plethora of talent in our district but the most encouraging thing that I witnessed was students being excited about the talents in their peers. I saw this again and again at events that included but were not limited to, sports, musicals, chorus concerts, art shows, science fairs, and robotics competition.

10. If you could change one thing about the district’s proposed school budget, what would it be and why?

I am not privy to every line item on the proposed school budget and do not have all of the information that the board has to make a thoughtful and informed recommendation at this time. The very first thing that I would like to do if I have the privilege of being elected to serve on the board is invest my time in researching and reviewing the proposed budget line by line.

I would like to take a very close look at how we can expand one-to-one technology initiative that has been rolled out in our district for our 6th grade students. This program is key to both encouraging parent/community involvement and increasing effective communication. Especially, for the children in our district who would not otherwise have access to technology. However, I don’t feel as if it would be fair to expound on a detailed plan until I have a full understanding of all the facts and figures.