



2016 Delaware School Board Candidate Questionnaire

Please introduce yourself giving a brief background of your qualifications and why you are running for the Christina School District Board of Education.

Desiree Brady is a native of Delaware and a product of the Christina School District. She graduated from Glasgow High School and continued her education, graduating from Springfield College. Desiree is the proud mother of two Christina School District students. Her son is scheduled to graduate this spring and matriculate into college in the fall. Her daughter is a Fifth grader at Keene Elementary who will be attending Gauger-Cobbs in August. Desiree understands the importance of a strong educational foundation and she seeks to be a part of the policy/decision making that goes into developing our educational system to serve the interest of our students. Desiree will be a strong voice for the students, families, and communities in the Christina School District. She is passionate about making a change. She believes in student achievement, family and community involvement, providing a high quality education for all students, and making our schools a safe environment conducive for learning.

1. What do you see as the board's roles and responsibilities? The job of a school board is fundamentally to hire and manage the superintendent and to create the governing policies for the district. The Christina Board is just beginning the process of hiring a new superintendent and that will be a primary task over the next few months. That superintendent will take the vision the Board has for the district and drive it forward. The Board has the responsibility of maintaining the highest standards for the district's students and families. The Board is the decision making body of the district. The Board approves the Budget for the district; they have the final say for hiring and terminating staff; they approve collective bargaining agreements with the local unions.
2. How would you describe an effective school board member? I believe an effective school board member is a person who is a good listener, has strong oral and written communication skills, has strong inter-personal skills and has a real dedication to student success and community pride. An effective school board member will be a strong team player, able to communicate, collaborate and cooperate. Our district's board appears to be split and often in turmoil and that gives the district the image of being split and in turmoil. Being a school board member is serious business and requires a serious commitment of both time and energy. A good school board member



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stays up to date on current educational issues, they have to understand educational “jargon.” A school board member has to be above reproach; they have to be trustworthy, they must be a team player. The Board is a team.

3. What skills, experience, expertise or resources will you bring to the board if elected? I am a good listener and I do not jump to conclusions; I am respectful of the opinions of others, especially people that I know have more knowledge or experience around a certain topic; I am a respectful person. I have a deep understanding and knowledge of the region of the district that I would represent; the Rt 40 corridor. This geographic area considers themselves forgotten, and I think they have been. This is a region that reflects a wide demographic spectrum: from very low-income to successful middle class residents. My work at the Boy’s and Girl’s Club allows me to interact with a large number of Rt 40 area residents. I know them and understand them and can represent them and give them a voice which they don’t believe they have now.
4. Please briefly share your vision for education in your district. (250 words or less) My vision for education in my district would be to expand the ECE program along the Rt 40 corridor. This will assure that more of our students are entering kindergarten prepared with the appropriate skills. Additionally, restructuring the grade configuration to K-8 or 6-12 will be beneficial for the students in the district. This will alleviate some of the challenges students face entering sixth and ninth grade. I would also like to see the district offer more educational programs that will attract and keep students in Christina, and assure that students are graduating college or career ready.
5. How do you feel about family engagement in areas such as shared decision-making at the building and district level? Please share at least three strategies you would use to increase meaningful family engagement in your district.

I believe that family engagement is a combined effort, a two way communication. It is important to include any decisions made regarding families the parents, the staff and the building leadership. Decisions should never be made in a vacuum and should be a consensus of all parties involved. Doing what is best for the positive outcomes of students should be the only driving force. Team work, like everything else, not one person making all the decisions. 3 strategies I would use to increase family engagement in Christina is:

- 1) Revamp the Parent Advisory Committee through Title One to be a meaningful way for parents to engage with each other throughout the district including sharing best practices



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- 2) Make all building leaders accountable for true meaningful parent engagement and not just checking off of the box. Provide a way for each building to demonstrate that they truly have engagement
 - 3) Provide Professional Development to all staff and administration on effective family engagement.
6. Please explain what your district will do or has done to comply with current anti-bully laws in Delaware? If elected, what steps would you take to address bullying, harassment and intimidation in your schools? What specific strategies would you use to improve school climate and safety? Our schools are all tagged as “Bully Free Zones” but that probably isn’t true. School climate and discipline are two huge issues which the district has promised to address in the newly passed referendum. We need more highly trained interventionists, counselors and mental health professionals in our schools. There are a lot of kids with mental health problems ranging from anxiety to traumas from unstable home environments. Bullying other kids often is an outcome of this, and bullied kids are kids who are targets often because of the behaviors displayed as a result of their anxieties and disabilities. We need to find a way, collectively, to deal with kids in need of help and get them the help, whether in the school or outside school in the community.
7. Please share your views on state assessments and the role they play in the following areas:
- A. Student Achievement Teachers have always used tests to tell them what the kids know and what they don’t know. I think a good teacher can measure kids’ achievement without having to use so many standardized tests. I’m not a teacher but it doesn’t make much sense to me to use a test somebody else wrote to test kids on something that the teacher in the class taught when the test writer was never there!
 - B. School performance Measuring, grading and comparing schools based on test scores isn’t too smart, to me. If you have a school full of poverty level kids, or ELL kids or Special Ed. kids you aren’t going to get very high test scores, probably. Does that mean it’s not a good school, that the kids aren’t learning? No, of course not, but that is how tests are being used.
 - C. Teacher accountability Teachers are being held accountable with the same test scores that are being used to measure school performance and student achievement. Some kids come to school from families that give them a lot of help and always answer their questions, check their work, get involved in schools; other kids come to



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school without that kind of support. So, the teacher for that first set of kids will be graded based on how their kids test, which is probably pretty good, and the teacher of the second group of kids won't look so good. Actually, the teacher of the second group could really be a better, more creative teacher but because the kids score lower on tests the teacher is assumed to be a poorer teacher. I don't agree with this!

D. Student accountability Of course students (and teachers and administrators) need to be accountable for what they have to do. But it has to be reasonable, it has to be fair. Students need to come to school regularly, pay attention in class, ask questions when they do not understand, do homework and come to school prepared every day. Same thing goes for teachers. Nobody should be held accountable for something they are not responsible for. That seems to be happening today in education and it is not right.

8. Please share your views on the current state initiative to reduce the amount of testing in our schools. Do you agree or disagree and why? Absolutely, I agree. So much time is spent practicing tests, taking pre-tests, taking tests, reviewing tests, etc when that time could be spent learning new things. I heard a teacher in my district say that her class had to take more than 20 kinds of tests in a school year. For what?? I think it is important to be able to show that a student in June knows more than they did when they came into the class in September, but testing a primary grade student every single week in reading on the Dibels test? That is a waste of time, in my opinion. And what are the other kids doing when the teacher is individually testing every child?

9. There continues to be a focus on full inclusion in our schools statewide. If elected, how would you ensure our educators receive adequate professional development on inclusion strategies, implementation of IEPs, diversity training for teachers and students and the necessary supports for sustained and successful inclusion? I am not sure that I agree with full inclusion. That means that a teacher could have a huge range of students in one classroom, all the way from gifted students to students with very considerable learning disabilities. I'm not trained as a teacher so I don't really know how a teacher magically works with all of those abilities at one time. Kids need to learn to live and play and work with kids who are different kinds of learners, from different demographic groups, etc. but I think we owe every child the best education we can give them and that means teaching them at the level they are on. I don't know if that is being done with full inclusion. I wonder if some of the climate and discipline issues arise because of frustration caused by being in a full inclusion setting?



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10. What are your views on allocating education funding in your district so that the money follows the child? In Delaware funding is allocated to the districts based on the district student population. There needs to be additional funding for special needs students, for kids living in economically depressed homes, and for English Language learners because they have to be, or should be in smaller classes, and have more resources so they can come up to speed faster. Education is expensive!

11. During times of fiscal constraint, what programs would you consider essential to keep or implement in order to maintain or exceed the current level of education in your district and why? Last year when the referendum failed in two tries there were a lot of necessary cuts: librarians were cut, SROs in the schools were cut, Para-professionals were cut. All of these cuts had a horrible impact on our classrooms in terms of class size/teacher ratio, as well as student achievement. Obviously, core subjects like math, reading, science and social studies cannot be cut. The arts subjects should not be cut because for many students that is their strength, their outlet. I believe that we owe every child a well rounded education: reading, math, history, science, art, music, athletics, economics, technology, etc. We may need to find a creative way to integrate some of these areas if the budget tightening era doesn't end soon. We have made some harmful cuts, in my opinion in cutting vocational educational programs. Many kids do not have a desire to attend college so we as a society owe them an education that will lead them into the workforce, but we are not doing that right now. Kids who want to learn a trade or a certificate for work entry (child care for example) need to apply to a vocational-technical school and those schools are in such high demand that they take kids on a lottery basis!

12. Do you believe extracurricular activities are necessary? Yes, I believe they are. One thing students need to learn to be productive citizens is how to collaborate and cooperate with people they are working/playing with. Team sports teach this skill. There are always some kids who really excel in sports but not in a classroom setting and extra-curricular activities give them an opportunity to be a star. That is needed, I think.

13. 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. Some of my answers above (#11, #12 especially) answer this. I read a report recently that said that kids who grow up knowing and being able to use two languages are much better logical thinkers. In Europe and in Canada and in nearly every country in Asia kids are taught English right along with their native language. I have always wondered why we don't teach a foreign language beginning at the start of primary school. They describe the world as 'shrinking' now, probably because of how technology has almost erased



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boundary lines and how fast information can move around the world. We have to be able to accept and understand other people from other places.

14. If you could change one thing about the district's proposed school budget, what would it be and why? I have not studied the budget that closely but I know I'd want to see more money given to teachers so classes could be smaller, especially in the city and the Rt 40 corridor schools where there are more low-income, ELL and special ed kids.

15. What are the educational strengths in your district? For many years, even when I was a student here, Christina was regarded as the best district in Delaware. We always had a lot of really smart kids in our schools. There were strong art and music programs because the parents demanded them. We still have a number of really good programs: the Cambridge Program for Honors students at Newark High School, we are building a bio-medical program at Glasgow High School and an Agri-science program at Christiana High School. We have a Chinese Immersion program at Downes School for K-2 this year. These are great programs and the kids are really excelling. We obviously have a great art program. I went to the District Art Show and I couldn't believe so much talent! Those programs shine!

16. What are the educational gaps or weaknesses in your district? A weakness is that we have lost so many, too many really, very bright kids who have left and gone to Charter schools. That creates a gap that is hard to fill. The weaknesses in my district are probably the same as every district in Delaware: we suffer because of inadequate funding from the state. We get about 65% of our needed funding from the state and the rest of it has to come from local property taxes. When the taxes don't cover inflation, or needed improvements to our schools we have to ask the citizens for a referendum: in other words, ask them to hike their own taxes. Not many people are eager to do that! But, last month we did pass a referendum so we can hire some additional teachers now.

17. With an increased focus on personalized learning and advancements in technology, what steps would you take to ensure the privacy and protection of student data? We really have to be sure that we have hired people with state of the art knowledge about technology security. I am far, far from an expert on this, but I know it is a big issue. We have to be able to assure families/students that their information is secure and confidential. We must never sell or share information. That is a must.

18. If you could change one thing about the current district budget, what would it be and why? The quick answer is that I'd provide more money from the State! But given that that is not about to happen, I'm not sure. I haven't been on the Board yet and I haven't studied the budget in any sort of detail. One thing is good and that is that the budget is



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always on the website and available for the public to see. People say that this district spends too much on administration but other people say it is not, percentage wise, different than surrounding districts. I know it costs a lot of money to buy the smartest, most talented people and that is what we need to have.

19. Do you see yourself primarily as a representative of the community or as a representative of the school system? I definitely see myself as a representative of the community. On the Board I would be hiring the Superintendent and that superintendent would be the face of the school district, I think. I have lived and been educated in the same community I live in now and I would represent. I know my community better than most so I think I would be an excellent representative.

20. What are your three overall education priorities that, in a perfect world, you would accomplish during your time in office? How will you go about achieving them? Why are these most important? Three priorities for me would be: (1) guide the board and district in the hiring of an excellent superintendent who would commit to staying here 5-7 years; (2) guide the board and district along the pathway to a New Christina. That would mean fulfilling the promises of the referendum we just passed: changing configurations of some schools to create a K-8 school thus eliminating that awful middle school transition that sets many kids back in sixth grade; establishing a 6-12 high school that would be a kind of magnet school for agricultural science at Christiana High School. And (3) make a real effort to improve the school climate and reduce discipline issues in our schools and start this with a new, friendlier Code of Conduct/Student Manual. These things are all important because they are all issues that send people away from our district in larger and larger numbers. Surveys that were done with parents and teachers this year showed that these are the major roadblocks parents and community members see that are keeping ours= schools from being "great" again. How will they be achieved? Teamwork between the board, the administration, the schools and the community. There is that saying that it takes a village to raise a child. That means everybody all together, everybody working together with the same goal ahead. We used to do that here in Christina and we need to do it again. I think we can!