



## 2016 Delaware School Board Candidate Questionnaire

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

Hello. My name is Kevin Ohlandt and I am excited to be running for the Capital Board of Education. I began a blog about education in Delaware almost two years ago called Exceptional Delaware. Since then, I have made it a point to post some type of education article every single day. While I originally focused on special education issues, it quickly morphed into something bigger than I ever dreamed. I firmly believe public education as we know it is in grave danger and plans are afoot to make it disappear forever. I am against corporate education reform, high-stakes standardized tests, data mining of student information, the marginalizing of at-risk students: including minorities, low-income students, students with disabilities, and English Language learners. I have utilized FOIA on many occasions to get information, but for the most part my articles come from very thorough research and examination of financial information. I have studied education laws for Delaware and the USA in all aspects.

I love blogging, but I felt it was time to evolve. I have all this information and now I want to help our district with that information. With a potential referendum next year, the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act, and Capital's current Strategic Plan in the formation process, it is a very exciting time for the district. But we also need to make sure we have our eyes and ears in every aspect of what is going on so we don't get lost in the shuffle.

### 1. What do you see as the board's roles and responsibilities?

A school board has complete oversight of the district. They hire a Superintendent who implements their policies to the entire district. They have a responsibility to be transparent to the district, schools, staff, students and community they serve. They need to make sure they choose the best Superintendent who needs to make sure the schools are hiring the best teachers possible. A board member needs to be able to look at the past, see the present conditions, and do their best to predict the future in order to make decisions for the district. A board needs to be able to work together for the betterment of the district and support each other. There is no room for ego on the board, but the ability to voice opinions and discussion are a must. There needs to be a mutual respect among the different board members so they can function as a team.



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2. How would you describe an effective school board member?

This would be someone who knows the education landscape at a district, state, and federal level. If a policy or contract is brought before the board, all board members should do their homework on the item and look at it from all angles: First and foremost: Is it good for the students? Will it increase the ability for students to learn? Can the district afford it? Would this be something our staff would be able to implement? If not, what would they need in order to do this? They need to know the community in the district and be able to listen to district staff, parents, and citizens.

3. What skills, experience, expertise or resources will you bring to the board if elected?

I graduated from college with an English/Communications degree with a slant towards journalism. I worked in the financial industry for many years so this gives me the ability to look at budgets and costs with a business acumen. I attend meetings at the Department of Education, the State Board of Education, and the Senate and House Education Committees frequently. I am on a first-name basis with many of our local legislators and feel I can speak freely to them about education issues. I have been very active with parents and teachers since I began my blog and I hear many of their concerns and advocate for them when I am able to.

4. Please briefly share your vision for education in your district. ( 250 words or less)

I would like to see less emphasis placed on standardized testing and more on the grades our students are receiving. I would like to see the teachers in our district, pending the outcome of the recent DPAS-II Advisory Council Sub-Committee recommendations, work with the district to come up with a teacher evaluation system that is more fair based on their capabilities and not false labels based on standardized test scores.

I would like to improve the perception of our middle schools. This would mean taking a very strong look at climate and discipline in all our schools. We need to find out what is working and what isn't, based on existing state law. I would like to see more school collaboration in the district and emulating the success and working with those that may need improvement in these categories. Our students need to feel safe.

I would like to see (pending final legislation by June 30<sup>th</sup>) the school implement an opt out policy so all parents are aware of their options.

I don't mind community programs but I don't feel our schools should become community centers. Students who need extra help should certainly receive that. If



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the SAIL legislation (after-school programs) passes, I feel outside non-profits or companies who are paid for services for students should pay rent or some type of compensation to the district for using our buildings.

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.

Family engagement is crucial at all levels of the district. We need to find a way to have more parents participate in district decisions, which the district is currently doing with their Strategic Plan. For events, we get a ton of engagement, but we need to find a way to make this happen on academic issues as well.

1) I would increase the amount of parent-teacher nights and have students lead this to showcase the work they have been doing in different classes.

2) When important board policies come up, such as the recent “Student Success Guide” for the district, I would want to make sure all parents receive emails and written communication surrounding this and invite them to meetings to gather their input.

3) I would make sure any committee or stakeholder group has true stakeholder input on it. I do not believe employees of the district or those who have some type of affiliation with the district should serve a dual role of district/parent. We need impartial and unbiased input to guide our district, not the status quo.

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?

I believe Capital has improved in this category, but like all schools in Delaware, we have a long way to go. I would actually want to find a way to have more teachers actively participating with students during recess and lunch. I believe any transition time should have eyes and ears in all hallways and classrooms.

We need to make sure all instances of fighting/offensive touching or other serious infractions are reported with fidelity. I believe some type of restorative justice practices should be implemented to help students take accountability for their actions



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and repair the offense. Parents should receive all communication regarding bullying or more serious offenses. Our building administrators need to look at the action and not what putting it on e-school does to the reputation of the building. The only way we are going to ever recognize these kind of issues is by recognizing it. If we put band-aids on something that requires stitches, it will always get worse.

**7.** Please share your views on state assessments and the role they play in the following areas:

A. Student Achievement: They are not an accurate measure of where students true strengths and weaknesses are. The results are not given to the teacher during the school year and there is not a complete breakdown of the questions and answers from the actual test. How can instructional feedback to a student help them the next school year with a different teacher? It can't. All these tests do is give power to the companies that want to "fix" education. If we keep giving these tests to students we are just giving them more power as we lose local control.

B. School performance: I believe standardized tests simply remind us of the socio-economic populations of our schools. Schools should not be labeled and shamed, or rewarded, based on this. If there were a system where every single school, student, and staff member were given equal funding and resources, that still couldn't give an accurate picture. Each student is different and unique.

C. Teacher accountability: State assessments should have no role in teacher accountability or evaluations whatsoever. There are far too many factors at play with state assessments and our teachers should not be the victims of tests designed to give false pictures of our students.

D. Student accountability: None whatsoever. So really, what is the point?

**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?

I agree the amount of testing should be reduced, but we have not taken a strong look at the role of the state assessment with regards to potential elimination of the Smarter Balanced Assessment. Any assessment that gives immediate and good feedback on a student's progress should be utilized in moderation. No assessments should be given back to back.



**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?

Inclusion only works if the supports are there. Each building needs to take a very strong look at how special education populations are integrated into each classroom. We need to make sure there are enough adults in the classroom to be able to accommodate the growing needs of our students with disabilities. We need to make sure the district isn't just looking at cost factors when determining student placement. If a child needs an aide to help them we need to do what is best for the child.

I believe every single teacher, staff members, and administrators need to be made aware of any potential student who could have challenges beyond what is normal for a child at that age. We should not do this to label a child but give them the extra level of environmental support they may need.

**10.** What are your views on allocating education funding in your district so that the money follows the child?

I am in support of this if it is done correctly and the funds truly follow the child. We need to be mindful that these funds would go specifically towards additional support and not towards capital or district costs, but true academic support for the child in need.

**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?

English, Math, Social Studies and Science are key to any school. But we cannot, and must not, give short shrift to the arts. Whether it is physical art, music, dance, or theater, we need to be able to give students the ability to participate in these types of activities.



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**12.** Do you believe extracurricular activities are necessary? Yes, they help to form a full picture of a student. Colleges don't look at grades only, they look at the full transcript which includes other activities the student took part in.

**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.

See question #11.

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

I would be very wary of anything aimed at increasing technology in our schools to the point of a blended or personalized learning environment. It is unknown territory and many researchers are very concerned about any lack of human interaction at these types of levels as well as potential physical effects of having too much "screen time". Personalized learning is not computer learning.

**15.** What are the educational strengths in your district?

It is very hard to answer this question because so much emphasis is placed on standardized testing. We have excellent AP classes at a high school level but we need to do more at the elementary and middle school levels to elevate our talented and gifted students.

**16.** What are the educational gaps or weaknesses in your district?

Once again, the shadow of standardized test scores plays a huge factor in our schools. I am all for "closing the gaps" but until we can find something that works without all the "punish and label", we are fooling ourselves if we continue to focus on this.

**17.** With an increased focus on personalized learning and advancements in technology, what steps would you to ensure the privacy and protection of student data?

I would not have our students sign on to any program with a company or system that does not protect the aggregate data on a student. While the personally identifiable information cannot be released, all education information going to an "education research" company is sent out, de-identified. The problem is when that research comes back to the state and what they are able to do with it. The Delaware Dept. of Education needs to stop following the federal mandates and then go a step further with these. I do not trust the DOE and it will be a long time, if they stopped their shenanigans now, until I could trust them again.



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**18.** If you could change one thing about the current district budget, what would it be and why?

Our budget is pretty tight right now. I would make sure all our contracts are at the lowest possible price and potentially look for new vendors if we are paying too much. If there is any “fluff” in the budget, we need to remove it. Any discretionary budget needs to be looked over and see what those funds are going towards. We need to avoid legal costs as much as possible and make sure we are not leaving the district open for any type of legal action against it.

**19.** Do you see yourself primarily as a representative of the community or as a representative of the school system?

This is a very broad question. I like to think of myself as a concerned community member representing the school district.

**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?

1) All students with disabilities are given the best possible education. In this perfect world, IEPs would be written by the IEP team and all services and accommodations are given to the student with no questions asked. This should be a no-brainer, but I believe we are more focused on the outcome than the road to get there. I think other struggling students, who may not have an IEP or 504 plan and don't have disabilities should have some type of individualized plan to help them succeed.

2) All students feel safe in our schools and behavior and climate issues decrease dramatically. We are looked at as a model district that others want to copy. Students are able to air their differences in a calm and supportive atmosphere. We don't set this up as a reward system, but one showcasing diversity for all populations and recognized that our differences are our greatest strengths and that we can all learn from each other.

3) Parents become more involved in the district and stick with it. For parents facing low-income or poverty, I would love to see job fairs at our schools a few times a month so our students and their families have more stable home environments.

In a perfect world, anything can happen. Unfortunately, we don't live in that perfect world. But we can do everything to reach this form of educational utopia. That starts by



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implement policies that put the student first. Sometimes children are talking loud and clear to us through their actions. We need to make sure we are listening and understand their voice.