

9 QUESTIONS FROM



Meet the Candidate: Jessica Vaughn

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

I'm running for re-election to the Hillsborough County School Board because I am passionate about continuing to improve our schools and ensuring that every student has access to high-quality education. During my tenure, I've seen the positive impact of our initiatives on students, teachers, and the community, and I want to build on that progress. I believe in fostering a supportive environment for educators, addressing the diverse needs of our students, and promoting transparency and accountability within our school system. My goal is to keep working towards creating a brighter future for all students in our district. When re-elected, my top three goals are: Fiscal responsibility, student achievement and solving our teacher shortage.

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

Ensuring that every graduate is ready for either college or a vocation requires a multi-faceted approach that includes curriculum development, support systems, partnerships, and resources. Here are some strategies that can be implemented:

1. Curriculum alignment and flexibility with college readiness and vocational training.
2. Career exploration and career counseling.
3. Partnerships with colleges and employers.
4. Soft skills development.
5. Access to resources and support.
6. Monitoring and evaluation.

7. Community and parental engagement.
8. Promoting a culture of lifelong learning.

Implementing these strategies can create a supportive and comprehensive educational environment that prepares students for success in college and their chosen vocations.

3. How should the district address underperforming schools?

Addressing underperforming schools requires a multifaceted and multilayered approach

Here are several strategies our district needs to implement in our underperforming schools:

1. Comprehensive assessment and data-driven decisions.
2. Increased reading readiness, especially in early elementary education.
3. Providing more support for our teachers and support staff.
4. Curriculum and instructional improvements.
5. Increased resources and funding to our schools.
6. Expanding our student support services and academic coaches.
7. Cultivating more parental and community involvement.
8. Focusing on accountability and continuous improvement.

Implementing these strategies requires a collaborative effort and a commitment to addressing the unique needs of each underperforming school. I am also extremely proud that we have improved our twenty two D and F schools down to just nine D schools.

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?

1. Pay more competitive salaries and offer better benefits.
2. Offer more Incentive programs.
3. Increase pathways into teaching.
4. Invest in more competitive marketing and outreach.
5. Analyzing better retention strategies.
6. Create a more supportive work environment.
7. Offer more recognition and advancement to our employees.

8. Provide effective and restorative student behavior support.

9. Increase community and parental involvement.

By focusing on this approach, we can create a more attractive and supportive environment for teachers, ultimately improving both recruitment and retention in our district.

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

School choice can provide families with more options to find the best educational fit for their children. It can also foster a competitive environment that encourages schools to innovate and improve to attract and retain students.

However, I'm concerned that school choice programs divert essential funding and resources away from traditional public schools, which serve most of our students. This exacerbates inequalities, as not all families have equal access to information, transportation, or the means to take full advantage of these programs. Furthermore, I have concerns about equal accountability and oversight of school choice options, particularly charter schools and voucher-funded private schools.

Finding a balanced approach that ensures equitable access to high-quality education for all students is crucial.

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

School testing can provide some useful insights into the education quality and experience of a school, but it has limitations and should not be the sole measure of academic achievement.

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?

In Hillsborough County, parents already have full parental choice when it comes to opting out of school curriculum. Parents can request an alternative assignment, test or restrict their student's access to any of our materials simply by contacting their child's teacher or administrator.

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

The safety of our students is a critical issue that requires constant attention and improvement. While our schools have implemented intensive safety measures, we must always be vigilant and proactive to ensure a secure environment for our students, staff, and visitors. Here are some areas that need ongoing attention and improvement:

Enhanced physical security measures, mental health resources, training and preparedness, community relationships, anti-bullying programs and crisis intervention teams. While our schools have made significant strides in these areas, continuous evaluation and adaptation of safety protocols are necessary to address any new challenges and/or threats. Student and school safety is one of my top priorities.

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

As a board, we constantly discuss and amend our budget. Any changes to the district's budget must be data-driven and focused on improving educational outcomes for all students. By regularly assessing and adjusting the budget, the district ensures that our funds are being spent in the most effective ways possible. As a school board member I have been micro-focused on engaging stakeholders, reviewing financial data, aligning our budget with our strategic plan, ensuring fiscal responsibility and advocating for additional funding. Our district needs the stability of school board members who already understand our district, our budget and who have demonstrated extreme fiscal responsibility and strong leadership in the most challenging of times.

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Meet the Candidate: Myosha Powell

1. Every time I attended school board meetings, I saw the way my opponent treated parents. They were met with condescension, disrespect and antagonism. The board is made up of seven members and five are in lock-step with one another to do as they please while dismissing the constituents they vowed to serve. I realized that the parents needed more allies on that board. While on the campaign trail, I've also learned how good teachers have been dismissed as well so I'm running not just to be The Parents' Ally, but to be a voice for those in our educational system who have been treated just as poorly.

2. Unfortunately, approximately half of Hillsborough County students cannot read at grade level. Despite the high graduation rates, under this administration, many of our students cannot read or do math at grade level. There are many things that should be addressed but I'll lead with this. We have many good educators whose recommendations regarding a student's educational needs go unheeded. When they recommend retention, many report that administrators dismiss the recommendation and say "they'll catch them in 3rd grade." Sadly, I've been told by teachers that they still push the child through and simply recommend them for an IEP as an attempted to get students the added attention they need for reading, but that is not what an IEP is for. Moreover, this method is not working when we have graduates that still can't read at grade level.

We need to make sure that we are adhering to policy and law. They are enacted for a reason. We can't simply dismiss them because they are inconvenient or will impact our "numbers." Retention works. I have met teachers pushing them along only put them back in the same situation, if not, worse.

3. I don't believe this is a "one size fits all" solution. Schools under perform for various reasons. There is a huge issue with attendance. As a result, in some communities, schools are underperforming because their students miss the first lesson of the day or are not showing up at all. Some performance issues are due to inability to keep good teachers. We have policies that are making it difficult for good teacher to do what they love most and that is to teach. Instead, they have to worry about paper work, IEP & 504's, the inability to have authority in their classrooms, demands from administration to have "100% engagement" as they are being assessed, and the list goes on. There is too much pressure on our teachers and that's one of the reasons why we're some schools are underperforming because we're losing good teachers. There are also bussing issues and more. The educational system is a symbiotic system that needs

all of its parts in order to function optimally, but there are so many areas that are breaking down under our current leadership.

4. I've discussed this with many teachers and they have said they are no longer the authority in their class rooms. They don't feel supported. Some have even shared that they feel like they are working in hostile work environments because of the violence from students. If we don't do a 180 degree turn from these bad policies immediately, we could lose our educators.

Also, many educators have shared that there needs to be better training. Over and over again I have heard the new teachers coming in share that they "were not prepared for this." Many of our seasoned educators say that they believe there should be teacher mentorship programs for our next generation of teachers.

5. School choice exist because charter schools and homeschoolers are producing a better product. Charter schools cater to the concerns of the parents. Similarly, in any industry, if the competitor is producing a better product, then that is where your dollars will go. I understand why so many parents are exercising school choice and I can't blame them.
6. No, I don't believe testing gives an actual portrayal.
7. You can't tax parents and the community and then demand that they take a back seat to what the board decided to teach their children. Civil servants should always be open to the communities concerns and looking for solutions. What we see under our current leadership is a dismissal of parents because our current board member prefers her own ideology above the concerns of the constituents she has vowed to serve.
8. We need to reform policies that do not properly address the increasing number of behavioral problems were seeing in our schools. We are only paying lip-service to discipline / consequences in our schools. As a results, there are some students that are being emboldend by weak policies which allow for them to create hostile and [at times] violent school environments.
9. There are many issues with the budget. You can't have a budget of approximately \$4Billion dollars and say that we need more money in the form of a [permanent] millage tax in order to give teachers a \$6000 bonus. There is something wrong with that. Those bonuses should already been in the budget and accounted for without demanding that teachers as well as community members pay a permanent millage which will increase their mortgage and or rent. Hillsborough county citizens are already feeling the burdens of home insurance increases, high gas prices and higher grocery bills but that doesn't stop our current school board from wanting more so much so that they are willing to sue to get it. If after a \$4Billion dollar budget you don't have enough for \$6000 bonuses then you're not being responsible with the communities tax dollars.