

Meeting the candidate: Beth Garcia

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

- I would like to continue with my lifetime mission of nurturing and strengthening children and teens. I have called Osceola County home for more than two decades, and I currently work on behalf of the community in several roles, including Public Educator for the Osceola County Fire Rescue and EMS, Founder/Director of the domestic violence awareness non-profit Life in Your Hands, and Past-Chair of the Osceola Chamber Hispanic Business Council. I have a master's degree in Education Counseling and an undergraduate degree in Social Work, Psychology, and Education from the Ana G. Mendez University. My husband and I live in BVL and together have five children, and six grandchildren. Currently, my youngest daughter is in the 9th grade and one of my grandchildren is in the 3rd grade, both in Osceola County.
- ·Students and staff safety
- ·Improve academic achievement
- ·Increase Pay for Classroom Teachers
- ·Expand technical and trade certification programs

2. In what school district or community activities/organizations have you been involved?

- School Social Worker for Department of Education, Caguas, Puerto Rico - school social worker at an elementary school providing individual and group counseling and therapy, creating prevention programs, helping students cope with crisis situations, educating parents about community services, providing referrals for services and creating programs to improve attendance.
- Homebound/ESE Teacher (Osceola County)- prepare lesson plans and instructional materials/implementing them based on individual needs.
- ESE Teacher Assistant and One-on-One (Osceola High School) – assist teacher with daily activities, help students with academic and essential life skills.
- ESE Teacher Assistant (Horizon Middle School) - assist teacher with daily activities, help students with academic and life skills, meal prep, personal hygiene (change diapers, take wheelchair students to bathroom) and other tasks.
- ESE Teacher English and Learning Strategies (Poinciana High School) - Developing IEP's; Create individualized Education Programs/Plan for each student, setting learning goals and accommodations, work with parents, teacher counselors, vocational rehabilitation to discuss student progress and future. prepare lesson plans and instructional material.
- Public Education Coordinator (Osceola County Fire Department All Osceola County School) -Developing training for all schools, creating curriculums, lesson plans for different educational levels, setting goals, and fire prevention activities.

3. What is the top issue you believe the district needs to address?

- School Safety. Nothing is more important than the safety of our children. As a former classroom teacher, I know that teachers can't teach and students can't learn if they are not safe at school. I will make student safety the School Board's top priority. I will ensure we have a sworn law enforcement officer in all our schools protecting our students and staff. I will work with the Sheriff and the Kissimmee Police Department to guarantee our school resource officers have the best equipment and training. I will require all our campuses and facilities to have up-to-date safety technology and policies.

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

- As a learning strategies teacher for Special Education students that I was, I would promote programs with learning strategies such as notes, organization, Cornell method, underlining, individual and group work among others. Always considering external elements such as psychological and social factors and exploring alternatives for mental health programs to reduce anxiety when taking exams. As a former school social worker in Puerto Rico, I understand how crucial it is to partner with agencies that offer multidisciplinary services to students. Also create incentives at the district's level that motivate students to study and focus more while we work on integrating parents using social and traditional media. My beginnings were as a special education teacher; hard work but one that fills the heart. I also experienced a lack of resources and limitations in the program. In my plans are coordinating focus groups and meetings with parents and teachers to explore alternatives and suggestions that can help our ESE students. Promotion of education and preparation for adult life. It is of utmost importance that our students are ready for the work place. Things as simple as writing a check, opening a bank account, learning how to sign, job searching, and more, I taught my students in the Learning Strategies class. It was very satisfying and productive for them. I would be a great ally of the AVID teachers and to continue implementing their strategies that enrich any subject because I believe in the program 100%, without forgetting to expand our technical and certification programs. There is a lot to do, but first I must get there.

5. How should the district address underperforming schools?

- Develop an action plan, forming a strong leadership team and improve instruction.

6. 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?

- To offer more competitive compensation for classroom teachers. To provide support for new teachers such as mentor programs, student pathway in high schools to provide financial support for students seeking a career in education; The use of technology to recruit.

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

- I recognize that we need to provide choices for parents and students according to their needs. However, I believe that in order for students to integrate to the public system there needs to be equitable measures in place in the public schools for the benefit of the student. This will provide more accurate measurement of the student's educational levels. There needs to be accountability and assurance that students are progressing; The same accountability that the public schools have.

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

- No

9. 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?

- School is to teach arithmetic, writing, reading, we need to go back to basics and the rest is the parents or guardian responsibilities.

10. What is your rubric for deciding whether a book should be banned?

- Sexually explicit, age appropriateness, violence

11. What is your position on the new law that implements new rules for teacher unions?

- I recognize the value and importance of the unions in supporting the members of the union to exercise their right to bargain. As a member of the school board, I have the responsibility that all decisions are in favor of teachers and community members.

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

- I will make student safety the School Board's top priority. I will ensure we have a sworn law enforcement officer in all our schools protecting our students and staff. I will work with the Sheriff and the Kissimmee Police Department to guarantee our school resource officers have the best equipment and training. I will require all our campuses and facilities to have up-to-date safety technology and policies.

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

- First of all, I'll need to assess district budget and money allocation. Also begin dialog with teachers and administrators to see what are their suggestions and if they are viable.

Meeting the candidate: Diana Graniela

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

- I'm concerned about the direction of our school system. I've observed that our school system is moving in a direction that excludes parental input. As a mother of three, including a recent newborn, I believe that community partnership is crucial as our community grows. If elected my top goals as a school board member are academic achievement, parental empowerment, safety, and transparency. I'm committed to upholding the highest standards of excellence and integrity and contributing to the School Boards mission.

2. In what school district or community activities/organizations have you been involved?

- I've been involved with Reaching hearts food pantry at Casa Familiar de Restauracion, a volunteer with project beautiful helping provide care boxes for Domestic Violence Victims and hygiene packets for the homeless, an advocate for ITSAN a nonprofit for those struggling with Topical Steroid Withdrawal Syndrome, a supporter of Team Awesomism and Twic3 as Good both are nonprofits for Adults with autism, Fundacion Emprendedores de Luz, and the F.A. Multicultural Inc. de Florida a ministry to help children have a better future.

3. What is the top issue you believe the district needs to address?

- There are a few that I feel need attention but my focus would be on student achievement and teacher recruitment and retention.

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

- To ensure students are I would suggest academic preparation, skill development, and emotional readiness. For instance, writing and communication, challenging courses, critical thinking and problem solving, clubs and sports, independence and responsibility.

5. How should the district address underperforming schools?

- Addressing underperforming schools requires a comprehensive and strategic approach. Such as identifying root causes and set clear goals which establish measurable goals for improvement and regularly monitors progress.

6. 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?

- I believe we need to incentivize pay, introduce a pay step program, and reward our veteran teachers.

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

- School Choice in Florida empowers families to select the best education and educational setting for their children and I support it.

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

- No, in my opinion there are many factors to consider and does not provide a full picture.

9. 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 believe that parental input is paramount and should always be taken into consideration. Collaboration with parents and educators can lead to stronger partnerships.

10. What is your rubric for deciding whether a book should be banned?

- I am not in favor of banning, but children in our educational system should have access to age-appropriate educational material. We have to be considerate about parental input.

11. What is your position on the new law that implements new rules for teacher unions?

- I'm in favor of SB 256 because it enhances representation, financial accountability within the union and focuses on the members interests by maintaining a higher threshold for dues-paying members.

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

- No, while many schools are considered safe continuous evaluation and improvement of safety measures are essential to address emerging threats and ensure a secure learning environment.

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

- Yes, I feel that the district has done good with allocating funds throughout our district, but more can always be done. I feel that with our growing population we should bring focus to children who are underperforming and children with special needs and IEPs and ways we can improve the setting for both teachers and students.

