

## **Meeting the candidate: Donna Brosemer**

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

- The primary goal is to raise proficiency rates to more acceptable levels. To do so:
- Classroom discipline
- Mental health/social services
- Realign relationship between board and staff

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

#### Gubernatorial appointments

- Higher Education Facilities Finance Authority
- State Board of Independent Colleges and Universities
- Daytona State College Board of Trustees
- Judicial Nominating Commission, 15th Judicial Circuit
  
- Volusia County Environmental and Natural Resources Advisory Committee
- Volusia County substitute teacher

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

- Classroom discipline. It affects proficiency rates, safety, and makes it much more difficult to retain or recruit good teachers.

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

- Current school grading means very little because kids are over-tested and under-educated. We need to test less, remove disruptive students, and allow more actual teaching time for both teachers and students. US News and World Report said in March 2024 that just 28.1% of Volusia's graduates are college-ready.

#### **5. How should the district address underperforming schools?**

- This may relate directly to the link between classroom discipline and the need for mental health and social services. The district's mission is education. We need a broad network of professionals to provide those services.
- We also need 8th grade math remediation, which has been found to be most effective, lasting into high school. Enforcement of classroom discipline is a top priority, which may require demanding more of parents than the district has been willing to do.

#### **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?**

- Eliminate the priorities of diversity, equity, and inclusion, which limits the pool of applicants and does not prioritize excellence.
- Stop adding more administrative positions while cutting teachers and programs.
- Enforce classroom discipline by greatly reducing the documentation. Teachers are required to submit to justify a discipline referral, and stop sending disruptive kids back to class without consequences. That leads too many teachers to abandon the effort entirely and try to teach in chaos, and it teaches the rest of the class that they can misbehave with impunity, so it reinforces disrespect.

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

- The explosion of demand for school choice is a direct result of the failure of the public school system. Taxpayers should be allowed to decide where their children are educated, and the dollars per student should follow the child.

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

- Not necessarily. The State tests three times. The district tests more than a dozen more times. Teachers have little time to do more than jump to the next test, because schools are graded based on how many are tested, and their scores.

## **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?**

- Schools are not the place for social upheaval. The district must be open and have no secrets from parents regarding curriculum. If a parent has concerns, they should be promptly and appropriately addressed to the best of the school's and district's ability.

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

- Books that are sexually explicit are inappropriate for minors, whether in text or in graphic novels. Florida Statute defines obscenity, and provides for penalties for anyone who provides it to minors.

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

- That is between the union lobbyists and the legislature. The district should follow the law.

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

- Students are not safe enough, but the threat is not gun violence alone. The threat is detailed in "Why Meadow Died," written by the parent of a child killed in Parkland. He documents the many behavioral warnings and policy failures that preceded the shooting – more than 3 dozen of them. If behavioral issues are addressed appropriately and timely, larger threats can be mitigated.

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

- The information provided to the public is very vague and sanitized. State and federal governments control most budget decisions, much more can be done locally. For instance, VCS has the largest food service budget in the county. Staff has told me about the enormous waste of food because the kids are served what they should eat, instead of what they will eat. During the fiasco over Covid funds, we added administrators while cutting teachers, moving them around the county, having them teach out of field, and cutting programs. No, money is not being spent in the right places.

## Meeting the candidate: Sarah Marzilli

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

- To improve transparency throughout the school district, reduce the testing requirements on students at district level, work to increase salaries and benefits for staff to retain employees in Volusia County Schools and increase programs available in our schools such as trades work programs, arts, AICE, and other programs that expand student educational experiences.

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

- Educator for 15 years.
- Currently teaching at Pine Trail Elementary in Ormond Beach.
- President of the Volusia Art Education Association
- Curriculum Cadre for Volusia County Visual Arts Program
- Chair of the VUE Government Relations Committee
- VUE Steward for Pine Trail Elementary
- Delegate and Committee member of the AFL-CIO Volusia/Flagler Central Labor Council

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

- Transparency throughout the district and Work to increase salaries and benefits for staff to retain employees in Volusia County Schools. We need to retain our veteran teachers. Students deserve a high-quality education from teachers that are experienced and committed to our community. When we lose teachers that have been with our district for 10 or 20 years, for example, we are doing a complete disservice to our students. We need to reward our veteran teachers with a competitive salary. I will make this a priority.

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

- I want to increase access to programs in ALL of our district schools and want to increase trades work programs for students. Students need to be prepared for the workforce whether they choose to be become a computer engineer with a college degree or a professional plumber. I would like to see vocational training increased, and offered throughout the county. We need to reach out to our business community within our district, as well as outside our district to gain insight to what our business community needs and wants out of our graduates. This type of data should help guide us in our decisions to fund vocational training. I want our high school graduates to graduate with real-world knowledge and training that will give them the best opportunity in the workplace.

#### **5. How should the district address underperforming schools?**

- Underperforming schools means students are struggling. Data needs to be disaggregated to see which areas students need the most help in, for example, math or reading. We need to look for strong leadership at these schools, give them support, and adequate funding.

#### **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?**

- Increase wages for not only teachers but staff as well and make sure the benefits for them helps ensure that our staff is cared for in our district. We will retain employees with better benefits and wages because they will feel valued. You can say you value someone or you can SHOW it.

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

- I am a supporter of public schools. I understand that choice needs to be available for parents to make a decision best suited for their families. We as a district that educates approximately 64,000 students, need to have an understanding of why families are choosing elsewhere (homeschooling or private.) Because the school choice program offers parents these choices, we must be innovative and offer a variety of opportunities for their child.

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

- It gives you a snapshot of performance of the students knowledge retained that year. It does not tell you about the classroom environment or school climate, those are how an experience of a school should be explained. If a student hates going to a school, but is earning an A, is that a true portrayal of quality?

## **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?**

- Curriculum is decided on in Tallahassee by the Florida Department of Education and we as teachers are required to teach said curriculum. Getting involved at the state level is the only way curriculum can be changed and reaching out to local state representatives is a great way to do this.

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

- I would support a book challenge policy that involves pulling in stakeholders from the community for input. This can include, community members, media specialists, teachers and principals. Lists should be created to easily find which books are being challenged and why, as well as, a process to return books if needed. Our Governor just also made it clear that challenges need to be coming from our parents in our county and set new rules that need to be reviewed. When a policy is implemented, we as a district need to be straightforward and follow the policy.

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

- More than 50% of teachers are in the union and I plan to work with both union and non union workers. The school board doesn't have the authority to decide if there is a union and needs to focus on district items at hand. It is the teachers and staff choice as to whether or not they choose to be union and if they meet the requirements through PERC then they will have a right to their bargaining unit.

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

- School safety is always a number one priority. I believe Volusia county schools is vigilant in keeping our schools as safe as possible. With that said, I don't think we should ever let our guard down. We need to continue with security and safety training. I also do feel, that we as a district, need to be more consistent on the policies for behavior and utilizing the matrix we already have in place to determine the consequences of misbehavior. Student behavior disruption in classrooms needs to stop so that the rest of the students can continue with learning.

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

- The current budget needs to be thoroughly reviewed due to the recent mishap of "Covid Funds" ESSR monies (\$200 million over 4 years). Accountability needs to be in place. What happened in the district with removing programs and causing almost 200 displacements of teachers, some who are now "out of field," should not have happened. This was due to gross oversight of budget funding. A budget dictates what the priorities are within the district. It is clear that this year's priority was not the students. My priority in the budget would go toward student funding. If cuts need to happen, then it needs to start at the top.

## **Meeting the candidate: Carl Persis**

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

- I am running for re-election to continue to be a positive contributor and build on the gains students have achieved. For twenty-nine years, I served as an elementary and middle school principal. I love the challenges of an educational environment and thoroughly enjoy being with teachers, students, and their parents. Keeping students and staff safe is my priority. Other top goals are:
- For children to have an early strong foundation in reading and mathematics.
- To continue adding career education courses so graduating students are prepared for the world of work, as well as, the military, or college.
- Recruiting, rewarding, and retaining outstanding teachers.

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

- Volusia County Council Representative, District 4
- Mayor and City Commissioner of Ormond Beach
- Daytona Beach Racing, Recreation, Facilities District, Chair
- Central Florida Public School Boards Coalition, Chair
- Volusia County Value Adjustment Board Member
- Futures, Inc.
- Parent Teacher Associations- I am a member in many schools.
- Special Olympics

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

- Declining enrollment & Staffing Exceptional Student Education programs.



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

- The graduation rate in Volusia County is 3.6% above the state average. The District offers more than 50 career technical high school programs, which have engaged students and kept them focused. The Volusia IB and AICE programs prepare students wanting to enter the best universities. The key is monitoring every student in high school to ensure they are on a pathway to graduation.

#### **5. How should the district address underperforming schools?**

- There is not one magic remedy for all underperforming schools. Data must be analyzed to determine the weak areas. Then, strategic training and assistance need to be provided to the teaching and administrative staff. All children deserve an education which will help them reach their potential. The District must ensure every effort is made to help every student.

#### **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?**

- There is a shortage of students entering the educational profession. Therefore, recruiting first year teachers requires a wide network of marketing to get graduates to come to Volusia. Recruiting veteran teachers requires our salaries to be raised substantially. Florida ranks 50 in average teacher salaries. Retaining teachers requires a combination of giving teachers the support and praise they deserve. They should not be placed in positions in which they are not certified to teach. Teachers need to feel valued and should be involved in decisions which affect them.

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

- I support parents having a school choice however, I do not support tax dollars being used to pay for students' education, for which there is no public accountability.

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

- As a school principal for 29 years, I can unequivocally state the answer is, No. There is so much more to a school than how students perform on standardized assessments. Schools need to be inviting, friendly places staffed with certified and caring personnel. Testing reflects student achievement on a given day. Schools are about helping all students each day become the best they can be.

## **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?**

- The curriculum is provided by the state and ensures students will be taught the necessary skills and have the knowledge to be productive responsible citizens in our democratic society. Parents have input in instructional materials before they are adopted and parents may opt out of having their children in a few courses, however, in public schools the curriculum must be consistent, taught by certified instructors, using the newest technology. This should not vary from school to school.

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

- Unless an egregious error was made in the age appropriateness designation of a school library book, I do not support banning books which had previously met the criteria for approval and recommendation by certified media specialists and the schools' principals. I support parents' rights to prohibit their children from having access to library books, in which they do not approve, however, that does not mean these same books should be banned from students throughout the county.

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

- Except for law enforcement, firefighter and correctional officer unions, the new laws adversely affect all other public sector unions by requiring them to meet the threshold of having at least 60% of members pay dues to stay active. The other public unions do not have a minimum membership threshold. As a former principal, I worked with three employee unions and always had good relationships. Many employees like belonging to unions to have their interests protected and their voices heard.

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

- Safety is my priority. Volusia County Schools maintains law enforcement personnel in secondary schools and guardians, trained by the sheriff's department, in all elementary schools. The newest and best locks and security cameras are installed. Security training is conducted regularly, and school staff is equipped with alert badges to get assistance for any emergency. Social media is monitored daily, and apps are widely used to give anonymous information about potential threats. When it comes to safety, you cannot become complacent. which is the reason it will always be my priority. We must remain vigilant and provide the resources to protect everyone.

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

- With a total budget of more than \$1billion, there will always be a healthy discussion on how the money should be used. We have kept our schools safe and student achievement is increasing. Therefore, money is being spent in the right places. Since a projected decline in enrollment is projected for 2024-25, the Superintendent wisely restructured positions generating over \$2.3 million in savings by trimming administrative roles. If the State provides only enough money to pay veteran teachers an average salary which ranks 50th in the nation, we will continue to have a problem attracting and keeping outstanding experienced teachers. This must be addressed.