

## Meeting the candidate: Cassandra Gonyer

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

- I'm running to bring the voice of a current teacher and parent to the school board conversations and to fight for every student and school to have the same high-quality educators, programs, and resources. My top goals are to build connections between teachers and parents, families and schools, in order to promote student success; attract and retain highly effective teachers and staff; and ensure all schools are well-resourced.

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

- I currently teach for Brevard County's Virtual School. In Volusia County, I serve on the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and School Advisory Council (SAC) for my daughters' school, Turie T. Small Elementary. I am also the school's representative to the District Advisory Council (DAC). I currently serve on the board for "Girls With Class," a mentoring group for girls in grades 3-12, and I previously served as the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Co-Chair for the Volusia County Council of PTAs (VCCPTA).

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

- In order for students and schools to succeed, we need to attract and retain high-quality administrators, teachers, educational support professionals, and staff. It appears that our District has become "top heavy," so we need to invest back into the people that work day-to-day with our students. All professionals that interact with students need competitive pay and support. We cannot keep staffing classrooms with full-time substitutes and have 1+ hour bus rides due to a shortage of drivers.

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

- I love the variety of programs that students and families currently have to choose from and we can grow this! I have previously taught IB and AP courses, which help students earn college credits in high school. We have a wonderful Dual Enrollment program with Daytona State College for students to earn both high school and college credits. And we have academies that can train aviation mechanics at Mainland HS and HV/AC at Pine Ridge HS. Let's partner with more universities and local businesses to give students opportunities in higher education and hands-on certifications.

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

- Schools are deemed "underperforming" based on test scores, which often have more to do with attendance issues than the quality of education. We must work with families to make sure students arrive to classes each day. We're already taking a positive step by providing free breakfast and lunch, as hunger can be a large distractor during the day. I would like to see more schools try a community-based approach, like Campbell Middle, by having parent classes in the evenings, entrepreneurship courses for students, and a food bank for families. We can care for the whole student rather than simply grades.

#### **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 appreciate Gov. DeSantis raising the starting pay for teachers, but unfortunately, this has compressed the wages for more experienced teachers. I would like the State to focus on increasing pay for years of service to retain teachers. Our District needs to be creative in our budget solutions. For example, Brevard County voters approved raising the millage rate to go exclusively towards veteran teacher pay. We can look at what is working or not in other districts for ideas to make Volusia more competitive. We can also move positions in the Deland office back to schools and classrooms.

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

- My family used Volusia County's choice program to fill out a variance request from our zoned school of Pine Trail (30 minutes away from home, in Ormond Beach) to our neighborhood school of Turie T. Small. I support families choosing and believe that most can find what they need in public schools. I even support public charter school like The Chiles Academy, which cares for teenage mothers and their children. I do not support the recent changes in the State's voucher program that has funds following the student as it often lacks accountability with taxpayer money.

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

- School testing is more subjective than we think, so no, it often does not give an accurate portrayal. I mentioned attendance being a large factor in low scores. How can students test well on material missed due to absences? Students needing accommodations or students currently in emotional/mental distress may not reflect their abilities on tests. My eldest daughter's FAST Math tests are an example: Level 4 (above grade-level) in the fall; friendship drama during winter testing, scores Level 2 (below grade-level); finishing the year at peace with everyone, scores the highest, Level 5 in the spring! What a roller coaster!

## **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 we need more, not less, parents and families involved in choosing curriculum. My issue is when one parent or organization tries to make decisions for the whole district. When Volusia is deciding on new curriculum, such as Social Studies last year, each school board member can submit the names of 5 individuals to serve on the review team. I worked with the board and under-represented voices in the community to make sure these families had a seat at this meeting. In public schools, our curriculum should accurately represent and engage all students.

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

- Volusia County Schools already has a procedure in place for challenging books. I believe each family should work with their own student to decide what is appropriate for them. No single family or organization should get to decide what the whole district reads. There are parts of my Bible that I direct my children away from until they're older, but I wouldn't ban everyone from reading it just because of a few passages. Same with fiction and non-fiction books on our shelves. Let's look at the worth of the whole book.

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

- My biggest question is why these rules are being implemented for teachers but not others, such as police unions? This tells me it is politically motivated rather than a protection of the public. Teachers' unions are teachers, not some outside boogie man, so it's disheartening the state keeps moving the hoops that need to be jumped through in order to make sure teachers and support staff have a voice in workplace negotiations. Parents are an advocate for their students and the union is an advocate for employees. Both groups make our schools safer and healthier to come to each day.

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

- Single points on entry on campuses has certainly made schools safer. I also love the school resource officer (SRO) relationships our schools have with the Volusia Sherriff and cities like Daytona Beach. The SROs are part of the campus community so that students are more likely to report suspicious behavior. I will say, as both a teacher and parent, active shooter drills are traumatizing for everyone. I had to learn how to apply a tourniquet in case one of my students is bleeding out from a gunshot wound. School safety needs to be a much larger state and national conversation.

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

- I feel that changes need to be made. The School Board is responsible for setting the District's vision and then approving a budget to match that vision. It appears too much money is being allocated to positions in Deland when we should be prioritizing students, classrooms, and schools. No single school board member controls the budget, but we can direct our Superintendent to work with the District's CFO to look for ways to allocate money back to directly impacting student success.

## **Meeting the candidate: Krista Goodrich**

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

- I'm running because all kids deserve a quality education and they need a proven leader that will fight for them. Our board also desperately needs a member with a financial background, which I bring to the table, so that we don't continue to see the mismanagement of funds (like we just had) that result in losses of incredibly important programs such as art and music. We need a positive leader that will bring the focus back to education.

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

- 30+year volunteer with Special Olympics
- Keynote Speaker for the World Languages Volusia County Schools Festival and the Daytona Arts Fest.
- Volunteer and Speaker for Junior Achievement
- Participant Principal for a Day (Campbell Middle)
- Sponsor of the Chiles Academy Prom
- Board Member Daytona Beachside Redevelopment Board
- Board Member Daytona Beach Leisure Services
- Halifax Authority Advertising Committee
- Halifax Authority Travel & Tour Committee
- Board Member The American Red Cross Central Florida
- Board Member The Chase Academy School for Autism
- VRMA Government Affairs Committee
- Boss Lady Community Member Volusia County
- Volusia Women Who Care
- Daytona Chamber of Commerce Member
- Port Orange South Daytona Chamber of Commerce Member
- Member Main Street Merchants Association
- Member of Team Volusia
- Member of Hotel & Lodging Association

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

- Discipline

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

- Less testing, more discipline and accountability. Additional resources for CTE programs to work with local businesses. Training programs and classes in high school that lead to certifications that can be used in trades. College preparatory classes that push students to be stronger learners.

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

- I'm a fan of rewarding merit-this includes teachers, students and schools that have demonstrated exceptional work. I would like to see more parent participation in underperforming schools as well as community involvement. When a community has businesses and families that support their local school it provides additional resources for students, teachers and administrators. The burden should be shared with families and the school. The school should not be expected to parent the child.

### **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?**

- 1. The work environment needs to be welcoming. We need to keep teachers in areas that they enjoy teaching so they can excel at teaching our kids. The recent budget mismanagement issues have led to teacher reassignments that don't coincide with the teachers' strengths which will only lead to more frustration. Parents and teachers must work together. And of course, we must continue to work on good pay-a fulltime teacher should be able to afford to buy a home and still put groceries on the table-we have a lot of work still to do here.

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

- I'm a fan of school choice. As a former Board Member for the Chase School for Autism, I saw firsthand the benefits of children going to a school that best meets their needs.

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

- We have work to do here as well. We can't teach just to test, yet at the same time we do need measurements of learning. I think we are over testing right now and need to bring the focus back to learning the material first.

## **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 parents and teachers should work together to make sure our kids are getting a quality education. I have concerns over bias in education so think the best option is to have transparency in our school curriculum.

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

- Books should be age appropriate.

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

- Teachers will ultimately be the ones to make the decision on if they want to be a part of the union or not.

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

- School safety will always be a major concern and something we should always be working on; however, I am in awe of our Guardians and all that they do. More needs to be done to protect our crosswalks and areas around our schools.

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

- This is one of the many areas where I think I can be a huge asset to our board. Our budget needs a deep dive to see what has gone wrong. We need way more fiscal responsibility, transparency and especially accountability.