

**Oshkosh Chamber of Commerce  
Candidate Questionnaire**

**Spring Election 2024 – Board of Education, Oshkosh Area School District**

Please provide some personal background information.

- Name
- Occupation
- List any community activities you are involved with.

Kristopher Karns

I am currently employed at the Advanced Spine Center of Wisconsin where I am the Administrator (think CEA). I helped in opening up the surgery center almost 5 years ago. I have been on the school board for 3 years, I am president of Oshkosh United Soccer Club for almost 2 years, and I am coaching basketball with Oshkosh West Basketball Club. I am the dad to two boys (6th and 9th grade) and the uncle to a soon-to-be graduating niece at Oshkosh West. My wife is currently student teaching and will be graduating with her bachelor's and teaching degree in May.

1. What do you believe is your primary responsibility as a board member? What will be your most important objective if you are elected to the board?

Education is how we change the world. It is that simple for me. It is the ultimate equalizer and it is imperative we give our children the tools to be successful. My primary focus right now is our literacy scores and our long term facility plan. We have paid off \$40 million of our debt early so set us up for phase 2 with very little impact on the taxpayers. Right sizing our district to the appropriate buildings allows us to save hundreds of thousands per year on overhead costs and allows us to staff our buildings to the level our students deserve.

2. There are distinct differences between each of the four candidates who are seeking positions on the Board of Education. Please outline what distinguishes your candidacy and qualifications from those of your opponents.

I have lived in Oshkosh my entire life and I understand the differences throughout our community. I made it a goal of mine to visit every school in our district and I completed it this past fall. It is important to understand the differences in our community when we are discussing and voting on items that affect so many. My wife is a teacher and it is helpful for me to understand the challenges teachers face and how the board can support our staff.

3. The Department of Public Instruction produces annual report cards that indicate overall student achievement and engagement. While the Oshkosh Area School District received an overall score of 68.4, which puts the district in the “Meets Expectations” category, there are still opportunities for improvement when compared to the rest of the state in Advanced and Proficiency ratings such as English Language Arts & Mathematics. As a member of the Board of Education, what will you do to ensure improved scores in these two areas?

As a current board member I have been part of the board that has put literacy goals into policy. That shows how important we feel literacy is to our community and our district. Math will get added to policy eventually. We did see a 3% improvement in literacy and the admin team has already made changes going forward so we see a larger improvement for next year. Over the past 3 years we have laid the groundwork for the generational changes we are going to see in literacy and in math. It may take a couple years to fully realize this, but we have the right people and soon the right programs in place to support our students to achieve at the level they deserve. I want to continue my work on the board to turn Oshkosh into a destination district for many (education, sports, arts, music and more).

4. OASD is committed to ensuring all students graduate College, Career and Community Ready (CCCR). What qualities do you feel a student graduating College, Career and Community Ready possesses? Do you feel that OASD is currently succeeding in creating CCCR graduates? If not, what areas need improvement, and how would you help facilitate that as a member of the Board of Education?

It is important to understand not all students will go to college and that is absolutely acceptable. We need to give all students the tools to be successful when they graduate. We have a number of programs currently available and we continue to connect with more local businesses to increase the options. We need to continue connecting with our community to grow our program opportunities.

5. Tech Education - the old Industrial Arts programs - has been slowly disappearing for many years for various reasons. Please describe your thoughts as to the need for these programs. Describe how much emphasis/weight you personally would put on this in your decision-making process as well as from a policy, expectations, and accountability stance.

I see a lot of the previous question in this one regarding College, Career and Community Ready. We need to continue to invest in these programs to give our students the options to be successful.

6. Long-Range Planning – Oshkosh has made significant progress regarding facility improvement, and current examples are the opening of the new Vel Phillips Middle School in the fall of 2023 and the new Menominee Elementary School, which is currently under construction. However, Oshkosh area residents have seen their annual OASD tax bills increase by over 30% since 2020. With an updated 10-year Facility Plan in place, please describe how you will stabilize and prioritize this expenditure growth with more proposed school improvement projects on the horizon. Also, discuss your thoughts on how the OASD should address replacement plans and long-term preventative maintenance on its aging facilities, specifically our high schools.

The current long range facility plan came about because of the many failing buildings and decreasing enrollment in Oshkosh. The decreasing enrollment is not just isolated in Oshkosh as more than half of the districts in Wisconsin are seeing declining enrollment simply due to low birth numbers. We have long been a “low” spending district when it comes to our property taxes and we needed to adjust that so we didn’t see so much variation through the next phases of our facility plan. The current tax model actually saw a .3% reduction in taxes in the City of Oshkosh for 2023

and is setting us up for very little increase for phase 2 next year. It would have cost us over \$160 million to band-aid our current issues and the district and board at that time realized we needed to invest in long term changes to the current buildings. We created a fund where we can continue to take care of maintenance issues going forward so our district never gets in the current situation again. Also our district paid off \$40 million from the last referendum early to save our taxpayers from long term borrowing and increased property taxes. Investing in our school district, our buildings and our students is the best way to safeguard our property values and increase development in Oshkosh.

7. What reforms, if any, would you support to fund public school operations? What is your view of school choice?

I do not support the school choice / voucher program. There is no transparency or accountability for private schools that take public money. If this system continues then there needs to be equal accountability and transparency when it comes to student achievement, open meetings, and decision-making.

8. WDPI studies report concerning trends within the current education workforce, including declining teacher retention rates on new teachers within their first five years, education program enrollment still below levels seen in 2008-09, and only 67% of possible new teachers entering the public education system along with high numbers of unfilled K-12 education positions. As a member of the Board of Education, what will you do to ensure improved retention rates among educators?

Our district's retention numbers are about average for the industry, but where Oshkosh shines is our extremely high staff engagement numbers. We do need to do a better job supporting and paying our staff and I believe there is an opportunity real soon to take care of that with our operational savings from our new buildings/facility reduction. That is an important area of focus is to make sure all our staff members are financially supported to the level they deserve. That is one more way we can become a destination district, not just for students but also for staff members as well.

9. The Oshkosh Chamber of Commerce is working with local businesses and the school district on programming to help create employable students. Some surrounding communities have created alternative/untraditional programming, such as the ACE Academy in Fond du Lac, that allows industry professionals to teach their skilled trade specialties directly to as many as 300 students within the existing school year using hands-on applications. With teacher shortages and upcoming building construction already in consideration, would you consider adding alternative education options into strategic planning conversations if supported by the local business population?

I think it is important to always be open to new ideas when it comes to education. While we are a very large public school district, we do have a lot of resources within our community to educate our students so they are successful when graduating. I welcome more of those conversations as to how we can help our community and how our community can help the school district.

10. What are the literacy challenges students face, and how would you address them?

The biggest focus of the current school board is on literacy rates. We have an “all hands on deck” approach right now as the admin team is selecting new literacy curriculum and we use our highly trained staff to vastly improve our literacy rates. A big challenge in Oshkosh is almost half of our students are either at or below the poverty line. Many families have real challenges just meeting basic needs every day. We can always use more community support to help those families. All our students have a fundamental right to learn to read and write and as long as I am part of the board we are going to use all available resources to support our students, staff and family members. We all succeed when our kids succeed, and that is my focus going forward.