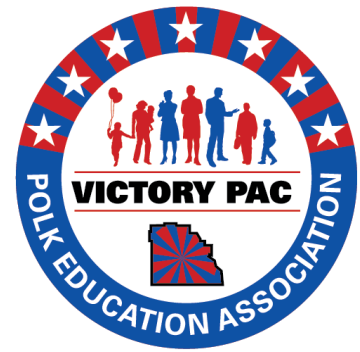


Polk Education Association-PAC  
School Board Endorsement Questionnaire



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Phone #: 8632599424  
Employment:

Community Organizations:

Campaign Information  
Headquarters Address: 4017 Oak Preserve Dr.  
Headquarters Telephone: 8632599424  
Campaign Chairperson: Sarah Fortney and Cyndi Wolfe  
Campaign Treasurer: Essynce Berry  
School Board District: 3

**1. What are your reasons for seeking a seat on the School Board and what assets do you bring to the position?**

I'm running because I believe every child in our schools deserves to be seen, supported, and set up to actually thrive—not just get through the system.

I grew up with education up close through my family, and I've also lived the reality of what happens when systems don't fully see kids. That combination is what drives me. I don't look at school policy as abstract—I see the students behind every decision.

Professionally, I've worked in child welfare, system reform, and youth-serving spaces where I've helped bring people together—families, educators, and agencies—to design better solutions instead of just talking about problems. I bring experience in listening deeply, building coalitions, and turning complex challenges into practical action.

**2. If there is an opponent for your seat, why are you the best choice for a seat on the School Board?**

There are two other people running, and I respect anyone willing to step up and serve their community. What I bring is a different kind of lens.

I'm not coming at this from theory or just policy preference I come from lived experience in our public systems, combined with professional experience working on reform at scale. I understand both what families feel and what systems struggle with.

I also tend to focus less on division and more on execution. I'm interested in what actually changes outcomes for kids in classrooms—not just what sounds good in meetings or campaigns. I think that balance matters right now.

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I am the only candidate in this race who has spent their entire career working directly with children. I am also the only one who has had to solve the real world problems of how to bring in more resources to critical public positions that in turn, turns into better pay and stronger support for staff. I also have more donations from every Polk County School Board candidate combined from educators and retired educators in Polk.

**3. What specific solutions do you have for improving student behavior in our schools?**

I don't think student behavior is just a discipline issue it's usually a connection, support, and environment issue. Unfortunately student behavior is more than just about what teachers can do it's about what parents can do to be a part of the solution. Government is not a replacement to parents.

First, we need to invest more in early intervention: counselors, behavioral specialists, and supports that show up before a child is in crisis. Too often we respond after things escalate instead of building systems that prevent escalation.

Second, schools need consistent, fair expectations that don't vary wildly from classroom to classroom or school to school. Kids do better when boundaries are clear and predictable but also when they know adults are steady, not reactive. Where leadership in schools will actually provide some sort of common approach.

Third, I'd push for more restorative practices that focus on accountability and repair, not just removal. Suspension should be a last resort, not the default response. When kids are pushed out, they don't get better they get disconnected.

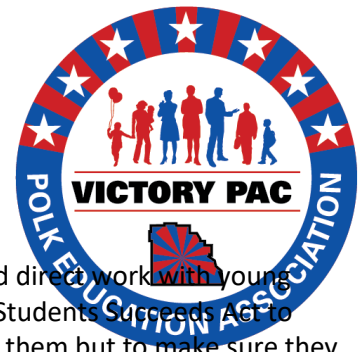
And lastly, I think we have to support teachers more directly with training and real-time behavior support so they're not managing these challenges alone in the classroom.

**4. What specific solutions do you have for addressing the severe shortage of qualified educators facing our district?**

I don't think this is just a "recruit more people" problem—it's a "why are people leaving and not staying?" problem. My Bachelor's degree focused on Industrial Organizational Psychology and it focused on what motivated people to work. Retention first, recruitment second. Districts are constantly filling buckets with holes in them. I'd want to dig into exit data deeply what pushing teachers out locally (pay, discipline load, lack of support staff, burnout, leadership instability)?

**5. What experience do you have in education policy and specifically working with people in other political roles and or state roles? How are you going to advocate for public education among other governmental bodies?**

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My experience sits at the intersection of policy, systems change, and direct work with young people and families. I also helped push for the passing of the Every Students Succeeds Act to pass which doesn't focus on passing children for the sake of passing them but to make sure they succeed.

I've worked in spaces where I've helped shape and implement child welfare and education-adjacent policy, often in collaboration with state agencies, foundations, and local leaders. That includes co-design work where the goal wasn't just writing a policy, but making sure it actually worked in real communities.

**6. How will you work with other people that have differing viewpoints to ensure there is a collaborative environment on the board? Provide examples of when you have done that in previous roles.**

I actually think disagreement is healthy what matters is whether people can stay anchored in the shared goal: kids getting a strong education, staff being treated as valued.

I've worked in environments where stakeholders had very different philosophies some very systems-driven, some very community-driven, some very compliance-focused. What worked wasn't forcing agreement; it was building structure around collaboration.

**7. Public schools have rigorous accountability measures to ensure tax dollars are being utilized in the best way possible to educate all students. What are your thoughts about private and charter schools receiving tax dollars without the same accountability measures in place as our public schools?**

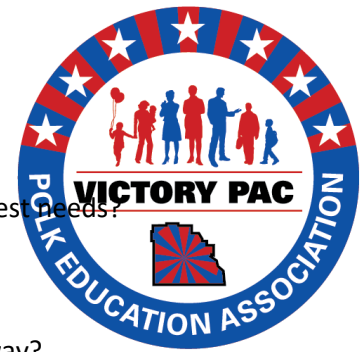
I think the starting point has to be simple: if public dollars are being used, there should be public accountability.

Public schools operate under very clear expectations—academic outcomes, financial transparency, open meetings, serving every child who walks through the door. That's part of the social contract.

So when private or charter schools receive tax dollars but aren't held to those same standards, it raises a fair concern. Not because those schools shouldn't exist, but because the rules shouldn't change depending on where a child is educated if the funding source is the same.

For me, this isn't about being "for" or "against" charter or private schools. It's about a few core questions:

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- Are all students being served, including those with the highest needs?
- Is there transparency in how dollars are spent?
- Are outcomes being measured in a consistent and honest way?

If the answer to those questions isn't clear, then we have work to do.

I also think we have to be careful not to unintentionally create a system where traditional public schools are expected to do more with fewer resources and more constraints while other publicly funded options operate with fewer responsibilities. That's where inequity can grow.

**8. What ideas do you have that would bring more resources, financial or otherwise, to our community?**

One of my core beliefs is that we don't just need more funding—we need to be smarter about how we generate and use the resources we already have.

A good example of that is energy. I would push for expanding solar infrastructure across our schools. Right now, we're spending significant dollars with companies like Duke Energy and TECO every single year. That's money leaving our classrooms.

If we invest in solar, we can reduce those long-term costs and redirect those savings into things that directly impact students; like innovative programming, classroom resources, and creating pay incentives that reward and retain experienced teachers.

**9. What is your opinion of a unionized workforce? How would you support the roles and relationships between our employee union and the Superintendent/District Staff?**

I believe a unionized workforce plays an important role in creating stability, fairness, and a strong voice for the people who are closest to students every day.

At the end of the day, teachers and staff are the backbone of our schools. When they feel respected, supported, and heard, that translates directly into better outcomes for kids. I would also use the surveys done to look at the health of us as institution.

**10. What would a PEA-PAC endorsement mean to you? How would you publicize the support of PEA-PAC for your candidacy?**

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A PEA-PAC endorsement would mean a great deal to me—because for me, this is personal.

I was raised in foster care, and so many of the people who showed up for me were educators, paraeducators, librarians, teachers. They weren't just doing a job, they were part of my stability. They had my back when I didn't always have that elsewhere.

At one point, I was labeled in ways that could have defined my future. But I'm standing here today because educators didn't give up on me.

So an endorsement like that isn't just political it's a reminder of where I come from and the responsibility I have to show up for the next kid who needs someone to believe in them.

And I'd make sure people know that. Not just by saying I'm endorsed, but by telling that story by lifting up educators' voices in my campaign, and by making it clear that this campaign is rooted in respect for the people who change lives every day.