

OYSTER RIVER TEACHERS GUILD VOTER'S GUIDE

The following questionnaire was sent to all candidates for School Board. Candidates were asked to respond to a number of questions pertaining to education in the Oyster River School District. This voter's guide is a compilation of their responses. It is not intended to be an endorsement of any one candidate, but rather a source of information to assist district residents in making an informed choice when voting on Tuesday March 12th.

- ❖ All answers are printed as received from the candidates.
- ❖ Official school district ballot voting will occur at town polling locations:

Town of Durham	Oyster River High School	7:00 am to 7:00 pm
Town of Lee	Lee Safety Complex	7:00 am to 7:00 pm
Town of Madbury	Madbury Town Hall	11:00 am to 7:30 pm

Two at-large positions (vote for 2)

1. Briefly tell us about yourself and your background? If elected, what experience would you bring to school board?

Thomas Newkirk	Kenny Rotner	Carl Piedmont
<p>I moved to Durham in 1987, and all three of my children attended the Oyster River schools. After graduating from Oberlin College I taught high school for three years in the Boston Public Schools. I am currently a Professor of English at the University of New Hampshire, now in my 36th year. I have been heavily involved in education in the state and region; the New Hampshire Literacy Institute that I founded is now in its 32nd year and has served teachers from across the country. I also founded the Writers Academy, a summer program for middle and high school students. The focus of my work has been on literacy; I've written extensively on reading and writing at all grade levels. In 2007, <u>Instructor Magazine</u> selected my book <u>Misreading Masculinity</u> as one of the most significant books for teachers in the previous decade.</p>	<p>My wife, Tracy Schroeder and I have lived in Durham since 1986. We have one daughter, Emma, who attended the ORCSD from K-12 and is now a freshman at Connecticut College. I have been a Family Physician in Durham for these past 26 years, first at Durham Family Health and currently at Woodbury Family Practice and Tracy is the School Nurse at Moharimet. Having been a keen observer of my daughter's education, I have learned both the strengths and the weaknesses of our school district. My involvement in the community, realized from my work as a physician as well as from both the time I have spent volunteering in the schools and the attention I have paid to the School Board these past few years, has given me a broad understanding of the values we hold in the ORCSD and the issues that we face. In the past, I have been the Chairman of the Department of Family Practice as well as the Chairman of the Department of Primary Care at Wentworth Douglass Hospital. I also served for</p>	<p>I live in Madbury with my wife, Amy, and our two youngest children, Alfred and Samantha. Alfred is in 8th grade at the Middle School, and Samantha is in 4th grade at Moharimet. Our two older children are Meagan, 21, who lives in Texas, and Austin, 19, who attends Trinity International University on an athletic scholarship. We are members of the St. Thomas More Parish in Durham. I graduated from Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana with a major in Criminal Justice and minor in Business. I currently work as the Northeast Sales Manager for Poseidon Barge Corporation where I must coordinate my opinions, wants, and needs with those of the Sales Managers from other areas of the country, making decisions to benefit the company as a whole. On a daily basis, I deal with budget constraints of each of my clients, balanced against the needs of their project. I analyze customer contracts with the General Manager, CFO, and Naval Engineer to be sure we are meeting codes and requirements while considering</p>

	<p>many years on the Executive Committee at that institution. These responsibilities, as well as those demanded by my career, have enabled me to become a good listener; able to hear various viewpoints and then to be able to arrive at a solution to the myriad problems that are faced to the satisfaction of all stakeholders.</p>	<p>the physical and financial impacts of the project. All these duties are quite similar to the processes necessary to be a successful member of the School Board.</p> <p>I have over 20 years working with children, coaching Police Athletic League and intramural sports, as well as student teaching. I will use my negotiation, communication, and listening skills to bring a fresh viewpoint and innovative ideas to support students and the community.</p>
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2. Explain why you are running for a school board position? What do you consider to be the most important issues facing our students, schools and the district?

Thomas Newkirk	Kenny Rotner	Carl Piedmont
<p>I have great affection and respect for our districts schools. Not only did my own children get an excellent education, but I have come to know many of the teachers through my work at UNH. It is a district respects the individuality of students and teachers. Having spent a year on the Board I have a better sense of its function (I now know what an HVAC system is). It’s hard to assess your own role on the Board, but I have tried to be reasonable, informed, willing to ask difficult questions.</p> <p>I see the most important challenges as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carefully exploring the options for tuitioning in high school students from neighboring districts. • Constructing a budget that balances support of academic programs with the need to moderate tax increases. • Addressing the capital improvement needs. • Developing a sensitive plan to rebalance elementary school populations—and eliminate modulars at Mohariment. 	<p>I am running for a school board position because of my strong belief in the need for a superior public education system in all communities. In specific, I feel that the ORCSD provided my daughter with an excellent education. Her experience has led her to be the critical thinker that she is today and has left her well prepared for the challenges that she now faces at her high level college. Having said that, I recognize that our schools can and must be even better. At the same time, we need to ensure that the cost of this education remains affordable to the taxpayers in our district. I am currently serving on the Strategic Planning steering Committee. By having in place a Strategic Plan, we will be better able to allocate tax dollars, while continuing to improve our schools. I believe that my knowledge of our community and our schools makes me well suited to work to further enrich the educational experience of our children while being fiscally prudent.</p> <p>I see the major issues that we face as a district to</p>	<p>I have a vested interest in the district with kids in the schools and I am ready to make tough decisions. We need diversity on the board. I bring a unique background from work and my personal life. I have children spanning elementary through college age.</p> <p>Working with the Oyster River community to deliver a long-term strategic plan is certainly important and relates to our decision making on many other issues. I consider school safety to be a high priority, including initiatives to keep drugs and alcohol out of our schools. We also need to face the issue of declining enrollment, its financial repercussions, and the opportunities afforded our students.</p>

	include the increasing competitiveness in a world economy that our children will have to participate in and our need to provide them with the skills they will need, the projected declining enrollments in our schools and the challenge of maintaining our programming as this occurs, the decisions that will need to be made about tuition students, the re-districting that needs to occur at the elementary school level as well as the continued need to focus on the health and well-being of our children. It is also crucial that we continue to try to control costs.	
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3. Would you vote for or against contracts that have been negotiated in good faith by the school board and the various unions in the district? Please explain your answer.

Thomas Newkirk	Kenny Rotner	Carl Piedmont
Having been through a negotiating round once (with ORESPA) I can't foresee a circumstance where I would reject a contract negotiated in good faith. The key, I think, is for the Board's negotiating team to work toward the goals that the whole Board sets—in that way, there will be no surprises when the Board comes to vote on the contract.	I would be totally supportive of contracts negotiated in such a setting, but with my wife being a district employee, it will most likely be necessary for me to recuse myself from any such negotiations as well as the subsequent vote on these contracts.	The School Board will establish a Negotiations Subcommittee that will work on behalf of the Board to negotiate contracts. I will support the advice of this subcommittee and Dr. Morse. I see no reason not to vote for contracts negotiated in good faith and I would support these contracts.

4. What do you perceive as the strengths of the Oyster River Cooperative School District?

Thomas Newkirk	Kenny Rotner	Carl Piedmont
I think these are numerous, but primarily the quality of the teachers. We have historically been able to attract, support, and retain superior teachers. We have given them the freedom to bring their teaching passions into the classroom. So while the salaries and benefits are an obvious attraction—the conditions for teaching are equally important.	The strengths of the ORCSD are many and I can't begin to cover all of them. We are fortunate to have an amazingly committed staff, both in and out of the classroom that perfectly complements the positive involvement of so many parents as well as the aspirations of our children. As a district, we strive to make sure that every child is able to reach	As teachers, my parents taught me to value the relationship between teacher and student, and I consider that a primary strength in our district. The individualized approach to student learning and class placement is a fine example of this strength.

<p>Other strengths are strong parental and community support for schools, focus on individualized instruction, an engaging elective system at the high school, and proximity to UNH. I also feel that we have a strong team of principals and administrators.</p>	<p>his or her full potential. We try to preserve the love for learning that is crucial to an individual's continuing to take those next steps. We challenge our children to not merely learn to memorize and respond by rote, but instead to be critical and independent thinkers. The ORCSD offers differentiated instruction rather than purely homogenous groupings. This allows all students to feel that much is expected of them and that they are not to be satisfied with a particular grouping. The myriad of electives that are offered at our High School are a wonderful opportunity for our children to follow their passions. Our nearly 0% dropout rate reflects the attention we pay to every student and the support that is provided.</p>	
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5. With a tuition agreement in place with Barrington, there have been reported in the media suggesting that Newmarket and Deerfield will possibly attend OR in the future. What is your position on tuition agreements with other towns?

Thomas Newkirk	Kenny Rotner	Carl Piedmont
<p>I suspect that we may have some options to explore in the upcoming year. The high school is built for about 900 students and currently has about 680 (of which about 600 come from the three district towns). If there was no tuitioning in of students, the high school population could fall to about 550 in 10 years. Such a number would make it hard, if not impossible, to maintain a rich elective system. So there are dangers in doing nothing.</p> <p>There is also a financial benefit to tuitioning in students, as much as \$10,000/ student which would significantly affect tax rates.</p> <p>The central question is this: can we maintain or enhance the education of Oyster River students by moving to a high school of 850-900 (about the size of Souhegan or Hollis-Brookline)? If the answer is no—we shouldn't go forward. For example, we should not adjust our</p>	<p>I feel that with our projected declining enrollments and the need to have a critical number of students in our High School in order to preserve the extensive elective programming that we now offer (and which I feel we should continue to offer), it is imperative that we take on more tuition students. It is equally important, that these students be a good fit for our district. They must aspire to the same objectives that we want our own students to pursue as well as be able to be assimilated into our High School without too much disruption. I greatly want to preserve and even improve the quality of education that we provide. I also want to preserve the values and philosophy that we hold dear. If taking in students jeopardizes those things, it may not be the best step to take.</p>	<p>The decision to tuition-in students has to make sense for our students, first and foremost, as well as the district as a whole. If tuitioning-in students can help maintain current programs and open new opportunities for our kids, all without hurting our tradition of excellence, I think it makes sense to accept these students. However, I feel I need to get much more information from Dr. Morse and his committee looking into this matter to take a stance on the current possibilities with Newmarket and Deerfield. Also, I would like to hear the thoughts of the students, teachers, parents and community at-large.</p>

policy on maximum classroom size to accommodate this increase. We also can't reduce opportunities for students (e.g. we might need more athletic teams, more dramatic productions to maintain opportunity)

I could imagine 4 options:

- No tuitioning in at all.
- Continue and possibly expand the Barrington tuitioning. The arrangement seems to have worked well, and a modest expansion would seem very manageable.
- Add to the Barrington option the tuitioning in of about 180 students from Deerfield. This would be a more challenging change, but Deerfield students have been tuition students in the district before. And they have historically gone out of district to high school.
- Tuitioning in of about 280 students from Newmarket. This would, in my view, be the most challenging option, both in terms of sheer numbers and due to the fact that these students will be losing their school. It might also mean not continuing with Barrington.

There is still much to learn about these options, if indeed they are options. It will be critical for the community (and teachers) to become informed and weigh in on these options as they become clearer in the next few months. It will be the Board's most important decision.

6. As a school board member, how do you envision your role and responsibility in supporting the district’s mission of working together to engage every learner?

Thomas Newkirk	Kenny Rotner	Carl Piedmont
<p>I feel we need to pay special attention to the student who doesn’t follow the traditional ORCSD pathway, the ones for whom regular school doesn’t “work.” We need to maintain options for them, involving internships, virtual classrooms, learning through work. I have been pleased at the graduation rate at the high school has been near or at 100%.</p> <p>One of my obvious interests is in reaching boys who may be unengaged with literacy. I would support a robust view of the kinds of texts they can write and read. As I say in my workshops, the house of literacy has a thousand doors—and you only need to find one of them.</p>	<p>As I have mentioned previously, I support the concept of differentiated instruction and would work to preserve that ethos. To me, the School Board has the responsibility to hire a Superintendent. With Dr. Morse, I feel that we have an individual who recognizes the excellence of our district and I trust that he will utilize his position to ensure the district’s mission. The School Board also reviews and revises policies that are instrumental in making sure that our defined mission is carried out. Lastly, the School Board approves a budget to be submitted to the voters. This budget needs to be affordable to the taxpayers, but also should provide what is needed for the schools to adequately provide for the needs of our students.</p>	<p>As a school board member I would work hard to ensure that we are adhering to our district's mission. We have a responsibility to make sure our policies are following that mission. Student engagement is one of the key ingredients for success in the classroom. But, I think we need to go beyond just engaging. We need to challenge and allow students to reach their full potential. For those who struggle, we need to ensure they get the right assistance to reach their potential as well.</p>

7. Our district has seen a number of talented, valuable and exceptional employees leave the district in the last few years. What will you do to attract and retain exceptional talent to the Oyster River District?

Thomas Newkirk	Kenny Rotner	Carl Piedmont
<p>There are tangible and intangible attractions to any teaching position. Obviously salary and benefits are important, and we need to make sure they are equivalent to comparable districts. But teachers are also attracted by favorable conditions for teaching—reasonable class sizes, good facilities, support from administrators, strong parental support and communication, an intellectually stimulating environment, and minimal energy-depleting meetings that take attention away from the important work of teaching. In this age of assessment, we also need to make sure that the assessments we use really benefit instruction, and don’t distract from it.</p>	<p>I have been saddened by the loss of some of our experienced personnel, but feel that we have been very fortunate in the quality of those who have come aboard as replacements. Just as we are lucky to have the engaged students that we have in this district, we are also fortunate to have such a qualified and committed staff. Staff perform best when they feel free to take chances and to be secure in their positions. I would hope to provide them with that sense of security and stability as long as they are living up to their end of the bargain. I feel that the retirement incentives offered to staff this year far surpasses any threats of layoffs and is a model that I</p>	<p>Retaining talent is always important for any team's success. I experience this in my every day work. Certainly competitive pay and benefits are part of that formula to retain talent. I also think making the work environment positive where people like going to work is important. I expect our superintendent and leadership team to help create the positive work environment that makes folks excited to get up and work in our great district. As for the past happenings, I am sorry that we lost talent. Looking forward, I hope that we can keep our valued employees.</p>

	<p>would want to follow in upcoming years if our student body decreases as projected. I am not an educator per se (although there are direct similarities between my work as a doctor and the work done by a teacher), and I recognize that I should leave it up to the specialists (our leadership team) to direct our district employees. The strength of our district's employees should be recognized and appreciated and they should be sought out for input when appropriate.</p>	
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8. How can the board continue to reconcile budget constraints while maintaining smaller class sizes and a superior educational “product”?

Thomas Newkirk	Kenny Rotner	Carl Piedmont
<p>There is no simple answer to this. As a Board we need to be knowledgeable advocates for the qualities that define our district, some of which I have tried to articulate in previous answers. But not every position or program is sacred. If we fail to ask hard questions and make hard decisions, I worry that we will be faced, at some point, with a taxpayer revolt and a tax cap, as has happened in other districts. If we had worked under a 2% tax cap this year we would have had to cut another 1 million dollars—the equivalent of about 14 classroom teachers. That must be avoided.</p>	<p>We as a board will need to look for additional streams of revenue as well as to make certain that we are spending money wisely. To increase revenue, we can explore the options of offering pre-K as well as full day kindergarten while also increasing the number of tuition students we bring into our district. I would work to make the ORCSD a magnet district for our area. By redistricting our elementary schools, we can possibly save the money that is now being spent on modular units at Moharimet. I would continue the work that has made our facilities more efficient and the resultant decrease in energy usage and spending that was obtained. If appropriate, I would continue to periodically offer retirement incentive plans to staff in order to achieve the proper ratio of students to employees.</p>	<p>I think we need to be creative and think out of the box when it comes to the budget. I would definitely support maintaining small class sizes and a superior educational "product" for our students. I think we have to also face realities and prioritize what helps the students the most. I would like to see us look to save money with energy spending and making our schools run more efficiently. I would support bringing in tuition money if it makes it possible to retain what we value. Lastly, I would be interested in seeking alternate ways to generate revenues for the district, yet being considerate of the burden of our taxpayers.</p>