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**Olson's Fourth Bid To Represent The Tampa Schools**

**By Patricia Hawke**

The Tampa schools are part of the Hillsborough County School Board, and Candy Olson has represented the south Tampa schools for 12 years. The nonpartisan District 2 covers the south Tampa schools and curves into part of southwest Hillsborough County. Olson has twice been chairman of the school board.

The 58-year-old mother of two has faced challengers only once during her three previous bids for her school board seat. This year she faces two challengers, who want to represent the south Tampa schools -- Logan Cobb, a 17-year-old high school senior, and Bart Birdsall, a middle school media specialist. According to the Tampa Tribune, neither challenger for the south Tampa schools has raised much capital or waged much of a campaign against Olson.

During the 12 years Olson has represented the south Tampa schools, she has seen the district grow by more than 50,000 students. It is now the nation's ninth largest school district. She has helped decide hundreds of policies and personnel decisions, many of which affect the Tampa schools, and has seen the district managed by three different superintendents.

With a master's degree in business administration, Olson's pet peeve is to reduce the myriad of forms used by the district and the bureaucratic paperwork -- a goal that continues to elude her.

During her tenure, Olson pushed the district to develop a school choice plan to give parents more options, which was implemented in 2004. She fostered partnerships between local libraries and schools, including those in south Tampa schools area and the Nature's Classroom, an outdoor classroom for science study. She has been supportive of teachers' issues, speaking out or bucking popular thought, when necessary. Though she comes on strong at times, she admittedly has learned to hold her tongue from the dais, especially when someone makes (what she considers) a dumb comment to her.

Two issues are pending before the board for this school year. One is whether to add more religious holidays to the school calendar. The second, a more controversial issue, is whether to make a policy that restricts soda and unhealthy foods in schools. The district currently needs to renegotiate their

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PepsiCo contract; however, they would like more discussion on this issue before proceeding.

Olson believes the most important priorities for the board this year continues to be student achievement, growth and developing a plan to reach children of uninvolved parents.

Olson is a former director of finance and planning for the Drug Abuse Comprehensive Coordinating Office in Tampa and information officer for the Boston Mayor's office. According to the Tribune, she has raised nearly \$20,000 in reported campaign contributions and loans, mostly from lawyers, educators and current district administrators. She is endorsed by the Hillsborough Classroom Teachers' Association.

Patricia Hawke is a staff writer for Schools K–12, providing free, in–depth reports on all U.S. public and private K–12 schools. For more information on Tampa schools visit

<http://www.schoolsk–12.com/Florida/Tampa/index.html>

### **Tampa Schools Encouraged -- Student Referrals To County Disciplinary Panel Down**

**By Patricia Hawke**

The Tampa schools are a member of the Hillsborough County School District, in which the Disciplinary Committee resides. The disciplinary panel deals with the troubled youth who commit serious offenses and policy violations at school. The panel imposes such measures as expulsion or reassignment to another school.

This past school year of 2005–2006 had the lowest number of referrals to this disciplinary panel than any other since the 1998–1999 school year.

Tampa schools, along with the other school districts, have been trying harder to solve student problems in–school, before making referrals to the panel. This obviously has increased the number of in–school suspensions over previous years; however, the Tampa schools believe their mission is to teach children -- and you cannot teach those who are not attending school. Tampa schools have cautioned their principals to be more patient and tolerant with problem students, when their offenses do not hold a danger to other students, educators and school employees. Additionally, Tampa schools educators have been educating students more aggressively on the district's zero tolerance of violent acts and other serious offenses, strongly stressing the consequences of such acts.

The Hillsborough County School District has about 191,000 students, many of which belong to the Tampa schools (the county seat). In the 2004–2005 school year, 1,602 students were referred to the panel for hearings. Those referrals decreased to 1,369 students in the 2005–2006 school year. These resulted in:

·183 students expelled; ·660 recommended for change of school placement; ·More than 400 were exceptional education students, who legally cannot be expelled and were recommended for change of school placement; and ·113 received no expulsion or change of school placement.

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The panel also saw a drop in weapons referrals. In the 2004–2005 school years, there were 336 weapons offenses. In 2005–2006, they received 311 weapons referrals, of which 19 percent were firearms. The surprising statistic is that more middle school students brought firearms to school than high school students, though this trend was seen in Pasco, Pinellas and Polk counties, as well.

Principal Katie Hoffman, of the Tampa schools' Madison Middle School, believes that the psychological development and maturity level of this age group may have something to do with the high statistics. She believes that children at this age try to impress others at a higher rate than high school students, testing their limits and succumbing to peer pressure to prove themselves.

Unfortunately for the Tampa schools, their Chamberlain Senior High School had the most overall referrals with 49. Tampa schools' Blake High School came in second with 40. The Tampa schools' also led the way for elementary offense referrals with five for Cahoon Elementary.

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