

# MTI-VOTERS

## 2017 School Board Election Questionnaire

Please respond to the following questions. If you wish to add to/clarify your response, please do so by attaching the additional information, and designate your response by the corresponding number which appears in the questionnaire. *Please deliver your responses to MTI Headquarters (821 Williamson Street) by January 13.*

*MTI-Voters will be interviewing candidates on the evening of Tuesday, January 24, between 4:00 pm and 8:00 pm.*

### 1. Why are you running for the MMSD Board of Education?

I have three young children and believe the BOE needs more current parents. We see what new programs look like in the classroom, and we see how the classroom environment supports – or doesn't – our kids and teachers. I will be a district parent for the next 18 years and am committed to the future of MMSD.

I also believe the BOE needs members who have experience with management and budgets. I spent the last decade working with Fortune 500 CEOs and have also been the CEO of a successful startup. I know how to manage a large budget, how to work with a team, and how to effectively roll out changes to large organizations. I believe my experience on the team would improve our ability to prioritize funds and roll out new programs successfully.

### 2. Name three things you believe the MMSD does well.

- i. Teachers. I worked in public high schools early in my career and have seen many teachers in action. The teachers in the district are among the most dedicated and talented I've ever seen.
- ii. Focus on excellence with equity. Focus on a single priority often produces better results, and the dialogue in our community is focused on the achievement gap.
- iii. Total funding. Our district spends \$421 Million - more per student than 80% of districts in the country. We live in a community committed to education and that is willing to fund our public schools.

### 3. Name three things you believe the MMSD needs to improve.

- i. Achievement gap. While we are beginning to make progress here, there is more work to do.
- ii. Teacher support. We need to ensure that MMSD is a great place to work through compensation, systematic support, and recognition for teachers. I believe pay matters. MMSD teacher pay, particularly early in their careers, lags many comparable districts and makes it hard to recruit and retain teachers.
- iii. Communication. The district has rolled out many changes over the past two years, and communication before and after has not always been effective. Teachers, families, and students need a voice through the whole process, and the process must last longer than just a few months.

### 4. How do you think the MMSD should address these challenges?

Given that MMSD spends more per student than most other districts in the state or country, it is inexcusable that we have lower starting pay than many comparable districts. We can reprioritize funds within the current

budget to address this challenge. I believe supporting teachers better, as well as hiring more teachers of color, will positively affect the achievement gap. In addition, communication can be improved through frequency as well as process; this means MMSD needs to take a more collaborative approach to new initiatives by incorporating teacher and family voices through the entire process.

**5. Name three things you believe the State of Wisconsin could do better to support public schools.**

- i. Change the revenue limit
- ii. Eliminate voucher funding
- iii. Repeal Act 10

**6. How would you advocate for these needs as a Board member?**

Given the current State and Federal administrations, I would focus on building a coalition of the largest districts in the state to form a more effective lobbying bloc that could call on local constituents in many locations to lobby their own representatives.

**7. What do you believe are the three greatest external challenges facing the MMSD.**

- i. Changing teacher workforce. Fewer young people are going into education. In addition, if schools become more privatized in the coming years this will have major implications for the profession. MMSD will need to adapt to attract and retain great teachers in the face of changing workforce dynamics.
- ii. Charters and vouchers. We are seeing increased support for charters in our community, as well as increasing numbers of families opting out (more than 6,000 children in Madison attend private, parochial, or nearby public districts). All of these opt-outs drain resources from the system and are also indications of our community being dissatisfied with MMSD.
- iii. Increasing inequity in society. As our country becomes more unequal, our schools also absorb students with different resources. Public schools are one of the few spaces where people from all backgrounds still work and learn together. Schools have an opportunity to break through barriers, but also a challenge to manage classrooms with students at very different proficiency levels.

**8. How do you think the MMSD can best meet these challenges?**

Madison has an opportunity to brand itself in education and attract teachers from national talent pools. We live in a great, progressive city. We are innovating to address deep race and class inequities. If we could also ensure we are a great place to work – great pay, a district where teachers’ voices are heard, supportive school environments – I believe we could become a national center for high-quality educators committed to excellence with equity. But we need to focus on this and make attracting great teachers (and keeping them happy) a top priority.

We need to meet the charter challenge head-on at the policy level but we also need to continue to improve our schools so that the public does not push for more use of charters and vouchers.

Finally, MMSD must form partnerships with other service agencies to address the deepening gaps in our society. When students arrive at school, these gaps are already significant. Continuing to address early childhood education and other services to equal the playing field will positively impact our schools. I am a part of this effort on the City of Madison Early Childhood Care and Education Committee.

**9. What are your thoughts about public charter schools governed by the BOE?**

There are three criteria I would use to evaluate charters: (1) cost, (2) accountability, and (3) ability to do something significantly different than MMSD otherwise could do, and that is a priority. In the majority of cases, charters will not meet these criteria and I would oppose them.

**10. What are your thoughts about private charter schools governed by others?**

These would not meet the accountability criteria above and I would oppose them.

**11. What are your thoughts about vouchers (using public funds to pay for private schools)?**

These do not meet the accountability criteria above, in addition to multiple other serious, unsolvable issues.

**12. Non-incumbents only: Have you ever attended a PTO, PTA meeting or a school board meeting? If so, what issues motivated your attendance?**

YES. I attend the PTO meetings on a regular basis.

**13. Do you believe that teachers and other employees should have a voice in issues that impact...?**

- a. Their pay and benefits: YES
- b. Their working conditions: YES
- c. Their students' learning conditions (e.g. class size, use of technology, building conditions): YES
- d. Curriculum and assessment selection and decisions: YES

**14. Would you support the reinstatement of collective bargaining rights for all public employees (currently prohibited by Act 10)?**

YES

**15. School staff experienced a reduction in take home pay after Act 10 was passed and salary increases have not kept pace with the cost-of-living. The District is experiencing increasing difficulties in attracting and retaining qualified employees. If elected to the Board of Education, what is your plan to increase pay for school staff?**

This is my top priority concern in the district. Teachers are the most important part of our kids' education – no curriculum, plan, or structure can make up for quality of the teacher. If we are not able to attract and keep the best teachers, then our kids will not succeed. MMSD is lucky to have more funding per student than most schools in the state or country. There is no financial reason our teachers should be paid less than others. It is just a matter of prioritizing what matters most. I believe there are **many** ways that we could increase pay and have experience working with budgets to prioritize funds. I also have experience attracting talent to companies using other non-compensation measures that improve working environments.

As a BOE member this would be my top priority and I would lead the charge working with MTI as well as MMSD to identify the best solutions. We cannot be a competitive district if we don't have the best talent, and we cannot attract the best talent if we aren't a competitive, supportive, and collaborative place to work. I would be happy to speak at length with you or others on this topic; we must listen carefully to what teachers are looking for in order to make MMSD a great place to work.

**16. Are you aware of the MMSD's collaborative employee handbook process with employee representatives? YES**

- i. If so, do you support the continuation of that process? YES

**17. Do you believe that parents and students should have a voice in issues that impact them? YES**

- i. If so, how do you think the MMSD could improve in that area?

Over the last several years there have been multiple initiatives rolled out by the district to create consistency, address the achievement gap, and more. But there have not been strong mechanisms created for local leadership teams at schools or mechanisms for parents and students to communicate well with schools and central MMSD leadership. While centralized initiatives and advisory groups can be strengthened, I also believe local schools should be able to work closely with their own students, families, and staff to put their own stamp on initiatives and incorporate local perspectives into issues that impact them.

**18. Are you aware of the MMSD's Behavior Education Plan? YES**

- i. If so, what are your thoughts about the goals of the plan?

I am supportive of keeping as many students in class as possible, within reasonable parameters while ensuring that all students are able to get an education.

- ii. What are your thoughts about the implementation of the plan?

Keeping students in the classroom requires appropriate support. Without the appropriate support systems in place, the classroom environment can become challenging due to a small number of students. We need to ensure we listen to educators in the school and provide the right resources to help them focus on teaching.

**19. What do you see as the proper relationship between the Board of Education and the MMSD Superintendent and Administration?**

The Board is accountable to citizens and it is our job to make sure MMSD moves in a direction that our community wants. I believe in setting clear goals for the administration that reflect our city's priorities. The BOE should act as advocates and liaisons to the community and we should also manage the Superintendent with feedback and hard choices when needed.

**20. Who do you plan to seek advice from should you be elected to the Board of Education?**

Teachers, families, students, and community members. As a former mediator, I believe listening with respect to all voices – especially those that differ from your own – is critical.

**21. Are you seeking MTI's endorsement of your campaign? YES**

**22. Are you seeking MTI political action contributions for your campaign? Not at this time.**

**23. Is there anything else you would like MTI members to know about your candidacy and why you are seeking election to the Board of Education?**

If you would like to hear more about my professional background or vision for MMSD, please visit [katetoewsforschoolboard.com](http://katetoewsforschoolboard.com)