

Madison Teachers Inc. BOE Questionnaire
Matt Andrzejewski, candidate for Seat 7

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

I've been a teacher for over 20 years. It is a challenging discipline requiring constant attention. It is awesomely inspiring. I love it. But, the profession is being demonized by the media, and unfortunately, even by our elected officials.

As a School Board member, I will work for every child. I will be a strong advocate for the frontline, our teachers. I will work tirelessly for resources to enable them to provide our kids with the best educational opportunities available. I will fight for social justice and equality of opportunity, for all kids. I will seek out the current state of our science and make sure our school district is guided by that.

I believe my education and experiences have prepared me well for this. I have a Master's degree in Education and a Ph. D. in psychology. I have worked in educational and psychological settings for many years, and worked with some very challenging behavior problems. The state of our science is good, but I don't feel that our knowledge has been leveraged well enough in the Behavior Education Plan. I would like to focus more of our attention on the positive approaches in behavior analysis and use this as a guide for addressing the discrepancies in treatment directed toward kids of color. I also feel that we tend to forget about our middle schoolers, that time when bodies and brains are changing dynamically. Again, our science is guiding us in very particular ways – sleep and circadian cycles, hormonal changes, brain plasticity, and extra curricular activities.

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

The MMSD supports high achieving kids with expert instructors and innovative curricula very well. The MMSD appears to listen to community members and reach out for their input. The MMSD offer a plethora of academic, extracurricular and social opportunities for students.

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

The most important issue that MMSD is facing is the achievement gap. This has ramifications for our entire community. Even though we support high achieving students, the MMSD doesn't seem to know how do we use this energy and professionalism for kids on the margins. Relatedly, the MMSD's BEP is trying to even out the discrepancies in disciplinary procedures that produce many unwanted consequences. I believe that many these problems are exacerbated by a lack of support for our Middle Schools. Lastly, I believe that Principal/Administration accountability, retention, administrator training, transparency, and communication is sorely lacking.

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

I would address these inter-connected and complex issues in a multi-faceted way. First, the Behavior Education Plan needs to be changed to reflect evidence-based education research, and

refocused on education, not on punishment. Second, we need an increased attention on our middle schoolers. This is a crucial developmental stage where mismatched students all too often can be ignored, tagged as failures or delinquent, or generally forgotten about. Third, I've seen how much positive influence a single principal can have over a school, and how quickly that influence can disappear when the principal moves to another school. MMSD used to have a mentoring program where retired principals would assist new principals. We should bring this back. We should give our successful principals time to grow with their school communities.

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

The State could make more money available for public schools by increasing state-level funding, removing limits on municipalities from increasing property taxes, and eliminating charter/voucher schools. The State could also invest more in professional development for teachers and staff and infrastructure, that is, to make a long-term investment in public education. Lastly, the State could encourage the UW system to be a more active player in public schools, thereby applying the Wisconsin idea to schools.

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

First, the BOE and its members need to be active in local politics, meeting with and advocating for the MMSD with our elected officials and community organizers. Second, we could assist with drafting and promoting legislation that supports our public schools. As a founding member of, and now president of the Wisconsin Association for Behavior Analysis (WisABA.org), I was involved in providing testimony and expertise in autism treatment, ultimately leading to the passing of Senate Bill 3 (2009) mandating that insurance companies pay for intensive behavioral treatment. We were also able to develop licensing standards for professional behavior analysts, the first of its kind in the United States (but now available in many other states). Lastly, developing and connecting with the vast array of centers, institutes, and departments at UW-Madison, and leveraging their energy would be fairly easy. I would suggest that a partnership program be developed highlighting points of connection and contact.

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

Our State government, unfortunately, is our biggest external threat. The current leadership's attraction to funding charters/vouchers reduces the support for public schools, both in financial and social terms. Not only do public schools receive less money, community support for schools is undermined by the rhetoric of choice. Our Governor, Senate, and Assembly leaders continue to undermine teachers, staff, and unions, de-professionalizing the discipline with talk of quick licenses and eased standards. This has serious consequences not only on the quality of education, but on our ability to recruit the best people for teaching and retain them in the profession. Teaching used to be a professional discipline that people dedicated their entire lives to, now we seem to be promoting it as a stepping-stone to other careers or as a charitable enterprise where people that were successful in other disciplines, but ultimately unqualified for teaching, can give back. The last external challenge for MMSD is the changing Madison area demographics. That is, the cultural diversity of Madison, especially in our younger generations, is shifting in

predictable ways. We should be out front of using this diversity to improve all our schools, by making our district more tolerant, more welcoming, more dynamic, and more global.

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

First, we need to protect our teachers, defend them, and not allow them to be demonized. (As a University professor I can sympathize with the feeling that my contributions to educating our young people is not valued.) Second, we need to ensure that there is diversity in hiring and promotion. Third, we need to stick together, support one another, and recognize that we're all in this together. Lastly, I would like to see our public school's role in the community expand. For example, at my alma mater, Liverpool High School, a local credit union has established a branch in the school. The branch is operated by students, provides financial training, and banking services. Really cool stuff:

<https://www.edgefcu.org/life-stages.html?showtab=2>

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

I don't think these are a good idea. I see them as a wolf in sheep's clothing. I think charters are a means to divert public money to private interests. In fact, it has been suggested that the existing charters within MMSD be given, to quote our administration, more "independence" or "authority" as a way to improve performance. This trend moves them farther away from the proper oversight and accountability measures. We probably can't close the one's we have, but we shouldn't open any new ones. There are many means by which school districts could study experimental methods or non-traditional pedagogy, without resorting to charters.

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

Not in my school district, if I'm the BOE.

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

No way. Not on my watch. The blogger, Jersey Jazzman, recently demonstrated the prevalence of religiously-affiliated voucher schools in the Milwaukee area and the agenda of Betsy DeVos: <http://jerseyjazzman.blogspot.com/2017/01/more-mapping-kingdom-gain-through.html>

12. Have you ever attended a PTO, PTA meeting or school board meeting? If so, what issues motivated your attendance?

I have attended several PTO meetings, at both Thoreau Elementary and Cherokee Middle. My motivation to attend Thoreau's meeting were: What can I do? How can I help? (At Thoreau, I helped with several fundraisers and events, in addition to volunteering in classrooms and helping run after school math Olympiad). However, my motivation to attend meetings at Cherokee was very different. In discussions with my daughter, other parents, teachers, and staff, there were numerous concerns raised: behavior problems, poor morale, and an unresponsive administration.

Frankly, these concerns motivated me to run for BOE – our kids, parents, teachers, and staff deserve a stronger voice on the board.

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

Their pay and benefits – yes

Their working conditions – yes, what adult knows the classroom better?

Their students' learning conditions – yes

Curriculum and assessment selection and decisions – yes

Unequivocally, YES, to all 4 questions.

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

I'll march on the Capitol, as I did years ago, for this...and expand it.

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 difficulties in attracting and retaining qualified employees. If elected to the BOE, what is your plan to increase pay for school staff?

We need to increase funding to schools, as I noted above. I will oppose vouchers and charters, alike, for they are meant to divert public money to private schools. I would demand and advocate for increases in corporate taxes as well; if we are to train their workers, they should pay their fair share. I would also make sure that the budget process and oversight by the BOE ensure a fair and equitable distribution of resources. I will make sure MMSD's fiscal priorities are first and foremost directed toward teachers and staff.

16. Are you aware of the MMSD's collaborative employee handbook process with employee representatives? If so, do you support the continuation of that process.

Yes, in lieu of legitimate, honest collective bargaining, Yes.

17. Do you believe that parents and students should have a voice in issues that impact them? If so, how do you think that the MMSD could improve in that area?

Yes, absolutely. As a BOE member, I have to be visible – attend PTO meetings, visit schools, outings, extracurricular, sports, etc. While the MMSD has used surveys and heard testimony, this information is restricted to people that have the means to be heard. Moreover, this information suffers from what psychologists call “sampling bias.” Fortunately, there are things we can do: focus groups, out reach, etc., to ensure the voiceless are heard.

18. Are you aware of the MMSD's BEP? If so, what are your thoughts on the goals of the plan? What are your thoughts about the implementation of the plan?

I have worked extensively, in numerous settings, schools included, with children and adults with challenging behavior problems. In my professional opinion, the goals of BEP are noble and good. But they are not particularly innovative, either. The district has suggested that the BEP represents a shift in philosophy from punitive disciplinary measures to more positive ones. While claiming that this is a shift, the BEP itself is still largely a punitive, disciplinary document. It offers little in the way of support for the positive approaches it espouses (about 3-4 pages, versus about 40 pages of disciplinary practices). What the BEP fails to provide is a systematic approach to changing behavior. The evidence strongly suggests that the effects of punitive measures are temporary, but the BEP offers few practices that teach alternatives to misbehavior. As we now understand human behavior, all of what we do has some function; it does something for us, misbehavior included. Often we do things for *attention*, or to *get out of* doing something we don't like, or for some *tangible* item. Yet, the form of that behavior, what it looks like, can vary widely. In other words, each child does things for different reasons. To treat each student the same way will undoubtedly create unwanted consequences. I would welcome the challenge of altering the BEP and resourcing our teachers and staff with the skills they need to more effectively manage these problems.

19. What do you see as the proper relationship between the BOE and MMSD Superintendent and Administration?

The superintendent should answer to the BOE. I would want the relationship between the BOE and Superintendent to be a collaborative one, but ultimately the BOE represents the public's interest in education and should take that responsibility seriously.

20. Who do you plan to seek advice from should you be elected to the BOE?

I plan to meet regularly with PTOs, parent groups and other community stakeholder groups. I will seek input from parents, teachers, principals, and MTI leadership former and current. As I have done during this campaign, I will also seek the advice of union leadership, former board members, and political leaders. I would also seek the input from marginalized members of our communities, those who traditionally have not had a voice. I will use my network of relationships to meet with them and be a voice for their concerns.

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

YES!

22. Are you seeking MTI political action contributions for your campaign?

Yes.

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

The challenges that the MMSD will face in the future are likely to include numerous new things. The prevalence of smartphones and the choice of bathrooms are two issues that illustrate this point. While many board candidates have ideas about current problems, I think we need to look more progressively. What is the role of the BOE and MMSD, working with the state, on the implementation standards of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)? How might the Supreme Court's pending decision on Endrew vs. Douglas County School Board impact MMSD's implementation of the IDEA?